

Weizman's mission

Israel will honour the agreements it signed, says its president, but it is an open question whether Ezer Weizman, through a ceremonial post, can give a push to the peace process. **Nevine Khalil** reviews this week's events

President Hosni Mubarak and his Israeli counterpart Ezer Weizman were in high spirits when they addressed a joint press conference on Monday. Although the Israeli press called Weizman's visit "mission impossible," it got off to a good start when Mubarak warmly embraced his guest at the airport before the two held extensive talks for over two hours.

Relations between Egypt and Israel became strained after Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu came to power last June. Hopes that the extremist rhetoric of Netanyahu's electoral campaign would give way to the more reasoned attitude of a statesman were frustrated as the new Israeli leader openly reneged on Israel's commitments in the Oslo Accords and in negotiations with Syria, bringing the peace process to a halt. "Since Mr Netanyahu came everything is frozen," Mubarak told *Time* magazine.

"I am very, very, very upset," Mubarak said in the *Time* interview. "I cannot give him a chance for four years." Mubarak added that the situation in the region is "boiling. The people are fed up all over the Arab world."

Netanyahu's continued foot-dragging also resulted in the failure of the Washington summit hurriedly prepared by President Bill Clinton. Both Mubarak and Weizman agreed that redeployment in Hebron was the most pressing issue on the table, and that Netanyahu should go ahead with a move that has long been overdue.

"The first step is redeployment in Hebron," Mubarak told reporters at a joint press conference with Weizman on Tuesday, adding that he would be willing to meet with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu "whenever they reach a stage for that."

"Now we are facing the problem of redeployment in Hebron," Weizman said at the press conference, but "I'm sure that the majority in the Middle East want to continue, because they want a peaceful area for the benefit of the inhabitants."

Mubarak said Weizman assured him that Netanyahu is committed to implementing the Oslo Accords signed by the previous Labour government. "The president of Israel said that Israel will honour its commitments and is going to implement the agreements," Mubarak said. "I didn't go into many details because there are still negotiations going on between the Israelis and Palestinians."

"We are reaching the moment of truth and we have to sit down and talk," Weizman noted, insisting that Netanyahu's government was not reneging on previous agreements. "The government is not going back, but it perhaps has slowed down [too much] for some people's liking," he said. Citing past security problems as a reason for the slowdown, Weizman said "we have to be very careful of what we do in the future."

Weizman described the riots which broke out after Israel opened a second entrance to an archaeological tunnel near the Al-Aqsa Mosque as "a mishap, hampering a little bit the atmosphere." Over 60 Palestinians and 13 Israelis were killed and hundreds injured in what was dubbed as the "second Intifada." Weizman would not criticise Netanyahu's decision to open the tunnel, saying that "this episode was unfortunately blown up." He added that the "difficulties" which Netanyahu is currently facing, namely stinging criticism from the Arabs and the international community, must be overcome. "I am sure that Prime Minister Netanyahu wants just as much as all of us to achieve peace and security," he added.

Israel's president admitted that relations be-

tween Egypt and Israel have had their "ups and downs", but that if it wasn't for Egypt's initiative in clinching a peace deal with Israel "nothing would have moved in the Middle East." Weizman, who was defence minister at the time, played a major role in finalising the 1979 peace treaty between Egypt and Israel.

On the way back to Israel, Weizman told reporters that Mubarak had given him a message for Netanyahu, but did not disclose its contents.

Weizman made his second trip to Egypt despite criticism back home that he was overstepping the bounds of his ceremonial office. In Israel, Netanyahu said that Weizman does not have the mandate to negotiate peace, but said he hoped the trip to Egypt "will help in bilateral relations." Netanyahu's office on Friday said that Egypt "represents a fundamental building block of peace between Israel and Arab countries and the president's visit is part of government efforts to improve relations between the two countries."

Former Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir told Israel Radio that Weizman's visit put the Israeli government "in chaos." "It is hard to know today who has authority for what," Shamir said. "There is no authority for the president of the state to interfere in political issues of this type in such an intensive manner."

"The point of discussing issues with President Weizman is not to create problems between him and the incumbent government; each has his duties," Mubarak said.

Despite his ceremonial role, Weizman has striven to ease the tensions surrounding Israel. One week before coming to Cairo, he took the unprecedented step of inviting Yasser Arafat to his home in Caesaria to soothe the Palestinian president. Weizman is not the only one putting in an effort. Europe, spearheaded by France, wants to play a bigger role in activating the peace process "not as a mediator, but to contribute to peace efforts," according to Bertrand Dufourcq, secretary-general of the French Foreign Ministry.

Mubarak received Dufourcq on Sunday at the beginning of his tour of the region. Dufourcq said that it was in the interest of the negotiations that Europe is present and active, to make "suggestions" when negotiations run aground. "Europe is practically the principal financial donor in the region. We wish also for an active political role." Mubarak and Arafat have called for a European role in the negotiations, but Israel and the US have refused. "We want to work in coordination with the Americans, not a sterile competition," the French envoy said.

"We could use our excellent relations with the Israelis and the Palestinians to create a better equilibrium in the negotiations, without taking sides," Dufourcq said.

The French diplomat also held talks with Netanyahu in Jerusalem and Arafat in Gaza before shutting back to Cairo to brief Egyptian officials on his discussions. His tour came ahead of President Jacques Chirac's week-long visit to the region which will begin on Saturday. "We are extremely worried to see the peace process either fail or drag out," Dufourcq said, adding that he will sound out regional leaders on the exact state of the current Palestinian-Israeli negotiations to prepare for Chirac's visit. The French president's tour will include Syria, Israel, the Palestinian territories and Jordan, ending in Cairo on 25 October.



Turning on Toshki

WITH the Nile rising to a maximum level behind the Aswan High Dam, on Tuesday, the river's water was diverted for the first time into the Toshki spillway, to be used, at a later stage, in cultivating desert land. President Hosni Mubarak, presiding at the water-diversion ceremony, said a new canal will be constructed to carry the water from the Toshki depression, for a distance of 220km, to a string of oases called the New Valley, located in the Western Desert.

"We have heard calls in the past for a new valley to run parallel to the Nile Valley," Mubarak said. "Now, construction works on the new canal will begin in January." The Toshki spillway was designed to allow for the automatic diversion of water from Lake Nasser, once its level rose to a maximum of 178 metres — a record level which the water reached a few days earlier.

Police comb southern hills

In an operation hailed by Interior Minister Hassan El-Alfi, large numbers of security forces searched mountainous areas in southern Egypt for fugitive Islamist militants. **Jailan Halawi** reports

In a wide-scale operation described as the first of its kind, large numbers of security forces scoured mountainous areas, used by Islamist militants as hideouts, east of the Nile in the southern Governorate of Sohag last week. The eastern mountains in the Governorate of Assiut had been declared "purged" by the police forces a few weeks earlier. Interior Minister Hassan El-Alfi visited the two provinces to compliment his forces and announced that police helicopters would be put in service in the near future.

Indicating the dragnet is not a one-shot affair, El-Alfi said: "The coming phase will witness intensive moves by security forces to comb and purge the Eastern Desert, its mountains and caves. Throughout their long history, security authorities have not dealt with the problems of these areas which provide shelter for escaped criminals."

Despite the difficulties, cleaning those areas is a mission that must be accomplished successfully, El-Alfi said.

The operation began last Friday when hundreds of security forces swept into uninhabited mountainous areas in the Governorate of Sohag to hunt Islamist

militants hiding there.

According to an Interior Ministry statement, the "terrorists" used caves and grottos in the mountainous areas east of Saqqala and Akhmim as hideouts and a springboard for their attacks.

As the security forces searched these areas, they came under fire from militants believed to be hiding in a cave, the statement said. The forces fired back and a three-hour gunbattle followed. Traces of blood were later found at the cave's entrance, indicating that some of the militants were wounded in the exchange, the statement said. Large amounts of supplies and blankets were found inside the cave, but there was no official word on casualties.

Police seized two automatic weapons, ammunition and a quantity of explosives during the operation which the Interior Ministry said would continue in southern Egypt's mountainous areas east of the Nile to "wipe out all escaped terrorist and criminal elements."

Due to the roughness of the terrain, some policemen were slightly injured as the forces were being evacuated by helicopters to Sohag and Assiut cities, the ministry's statement said.

The operation was said to have thwarted terrorist operations planned by the escaped militants because police seized, during the search, home-made explosive devices as well as papers listing their future targets.

El-Alfi flew by helicopter to Assiut on Sunday and inspected the mountainous areas from the air before landing at Assiut airport. At a meeting with police officers, El-Alfi praised the performance of the forces who searched the eastern mountains, demanding that the same high level should be maintained. He said that security forces would continue to take the initiative and would press their search operations in the Eastern Desert.

During a visit to Sohag on Monday, El-Alfi said that police would begin using their own helicopters soon. In the meantime, helicopters are borrowed from the air force.

"Security authorities will not rest until the escaped remnants [of militants] are finished off," El-Alfi said. "The search of the mountains which took place during the past few days is only the beginning. Despite the difficulties and the dangers, the security of the homeland requires that all areas should be purged."

Gun battle with Europa suspects

FOUR Islamist militants, including two believed to have taken part in a deadly attack on Greek tourists last April, were killed yesterday in an exchange of fire with security forces in the southern Governorate of Al-Minya, reports **Jailan Halawi**. An Interior Ministry statement said a police conscript was also killed in the gunbattle and another was wounded. Thirty-four suspected militants and collaborators were subsequently arrested.

According to the statement, police received information that a group of terrorists who had taken part in the attack on the Europa Hotel on the

Pyramids Road in Cairo last April, and other attacks, were hiding in fields near the town of Deir Mawas in the Governorate of Al-Minya.

Security forces surrounded the fields, but came under fire from the militants hiding there, the statement said. The police returned fire and, in the "intensive" exchange, four militants were killed. They included Ahmed El-Issawi, described as the commander of the group, and accused of being responsible for the death of 35 people in 22 terrorist attacks, and Hefti Ahmed Hassouna, thought to have led several acts of terrorism in Al-Minya.

The two were believed to have been members of a

squad of terrorists who sprayed the front of the Europa Hotel with gunfire on 18 April, killing 18 Greek tourists whom they apparently had mistaken for Israelis.

The statement said that one police conscript died after he was rushed to hospital; the second was said to be in a stable condition.

Four automatic rifles, a sub-machine-gun, a pistol and a large amount of bullets were taken from the dead terrorists, the statement said. "Highly important" papers were also seized, leading to the subsequent arrest of 34 militants and collaborators, the statement added.

Parents panic over meningitis reports

Rumours of an outbreak of meningitis, triggered by the death of a schoolboy in Maadi, were officially described as unfounded. **Shaden Shehab** investigates

Classes in many schools in Maadi were suspended this week after rumours of an outbreak of meningitis — a highly contagious and potentially fatal disease — circulated in the posh suburb south of Cairo. Although the rumours were denied by Health Minister Ismail Salam, the anxiety of school students were kept at bay by fresh reports of a virus. Its symptoms include headaches, vomiting, a high fever, convulsions, but it can be fatal. It is caused by bacteria or a virus. It is strongly about the spinal cord.

The adoption of such a name, Barring a case, Michael Boulos a 13-year-old student at Maadi's Victoria College who showed symptoms similar to those of meningitis. Around the same time, Rania Magdi, a 16-year-old student at Al-Amal school, also in Maadi, was rushed to a government hospital in Imbaba, suffering from a mild form of the disease.

"Michael died of encephalitis, also a brain virus but one that is not contagious," Dr Medhat Shabana, one of the doctors who attended Michael at Al-Salam hospital in Maadi, told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. "It is absolutely not meningitis." As for Rania Magdi, her case has been diagnosed as bacterial meningitis. "It is a form of meningitis but much less harmful. It can be contagious but it is like the common cold," said paediatrician Tarek Fathi.

Mahmoud Abul-Nasr, under-secretary at the Ministry of Health, expressed confidence that "the girl will be cured in no time."

Minister Salam, addressing a news conference on Sunday, firmly denied the rumours of a meningitis outbreak, assuring parents that their fears were unfounded. "The ministry does not hide the truth but provides correct information," he said.

In the meantime, however, Salam ordered that anti-meningitis vaccines be made available to parents and students. Many parents in Maadi, unpersuaded, kept their children at home.

Education Minister Hussein Kamel Bahaeddin ordered a two-day holiday for the pupils and students of Victoria College, Al-Amal and Orman schools — the majority of whom had absented themselves anyway.

"The ministry did not shut down the schools but gave the pupils a holiday in order to reassure the parents," said Mohamed Abdel Salam, press adviser to Bahaeddin. "Many panic-stricken parents are keeping their children at home. So, instead of considering them absent from classes, which would harm their grades, we gave them an official holiday."

A report in the opposition *Al-Wafd* newspaper alleging that 12 cases of meningitis were admitted to the Nile Badrawi hospital, also in Maadi, was denied by hospital officials. The report was described as "fabricated."

The rumours caused a rush on the Health Ministry's Serum Department in Agouza, where a large number of people flocked to have their children vaccinated against the killer disease.

The department's head, Dr Nabil Omar, told the *Weekly* that "people are acting irrationally. They are coming to us in crowds. But they should have more faith in government officials. When the minister of health says that there is no outbreak of meningitis, he is telling the truth."

Omar said that 2 million anti-meningitis vaccines have been distributed to government-run clinics nationwide and an additional 2 million will be administered to children directly by his department.

Edited by **Wadie Kirolos**



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Millions of workers cast their ballots this week in trade union elections. Mona El-Nahhas reports on the poll and Khaled Dawoud visits Helwan's Iron and steel

Privatisation dominates labour poll

Trade union elections began on Tuesday with nearly 150,000 candidates competing for seats on trade union committees at 2,400 companies and other work sites. About 4 million voters were expected to cast ballots in the elections which are scheduled to continue until 3 November. Simultaneously with the trade union committee elections, workers will choose their representatives on the boards of directors of 284 companies. Two out of a board's seven seats are reserved for workers.

The elections are supervised by a general committee, and 32 sub-committees, formed by a decree issued last month by Ahmed El-Awadi, minister of manpower. Each of these committees is headed by a judge and includes a representative of the manpower ministry and a representative of the General Federation of Trade Unions.

Although government officials vowed that the elections would be "clean", human rights and leftist political groups warned that the opponents of privatisation were being "excluded". According to reports by the Legal Aid Centre for Human Rights, the government purposely kept trade union activists out of the elections. "Workers who stand firmly against the sale of public sector companies and those who have certain political leanings were excluded," the reports said.

The centre's director, Hisham Mubarak, said the centre had filed around 90 lawsuits with the administrative court on behalf of workers who had been excluded. He described their exclusion

as a "flagrant violation of workers' rights."

Explaining the alleged governmental intervention, Mubarak claimed that "the heads of general trade unions were ordered to place obstacles in the way of certain candidates to prevent them from completing the procedure for their nomination. In some cases, they refused to provide them with membership cards — a document that must be enclosed with the nomination papers." Mubarak also said that the election banners of some candidates were torn to pieces allegedly on the orders of company directors.

"Some candidates who managed to surmount these obstacles will be excluded for tampering with the ballot boxes," said Abdel-Hamid El-Sheikh, a member of the workers' secretariat at the leftist Tagammu Party. He predicted that election-rigging "will take place on a large scale."

The government's objective, El-Sheikh said, is to keep the trade unions firmly in its grip. "The only way to achieve this is to bring in representatives who obey the state's policies blindly and serve its interests," he said.

But El-Awadi denied that the government brought pressure to bear on any candidate, regardless of his political leanings. "The elections will be conducted impartially and the best elements will win," he said.

Sources at the higher election committee said the



Candidates running for the trade union elections overwhelm many streets in Cairo with banners and stickers

number of candidates who were excluded did not exceed 100. According to Mohamed Moursi, the committee's rapporteur, they were kept out because they did not meet the candidacy conditions.

Moursi said that about 500 candidates had their nomination contested by opponents. "After a thorough investigation, it was decided to exclude about 100 of them," he said. "I think that this is a natural measure which has nothing to do with politics."

As the elections began Tuesday morning, the turnout of voters was meagre at the industrial suburb of Shubra El-Kheima, north of Cairo. Each balloting station was manned by three employees, who had little to do except wait for voters.

Walls were plastered with banners and stickers.

Security forces were positioned outside factory gates, ready to deal with any attempt to violate law and order.

The sweeping majority of candidates represented the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP). Leftists again charged that many of their representatives who oppose privatisation were deliberately excluded. Others complained that most of the candidates were old and that the younger generations were not represented.

The second stage of trade elections will start on 16 November with workers competing for seats on the boards of the nation's 23 trade unions. Ten days later, elections will be held to decide who sits on the board of the General Federation of Trade Unions.

Iron lady behind the mask?

Egypt's so-called 'iron lady' has been located in Athens and, as Mourid Sobhi reports from the Greek capital, the government is making an all-out effort to have her extradited.

The tracking down of a woman, believed to be Hoda Abdel-Moneim, who fled Egypt 10 years ago accused of large-scale fraud, has caused a flurry of activity as the Egyptian authorities attempt to secure her extradition from Greece.

Police Maj. Gen. Serageldin El-Roubi, chief of the Egyptian chapter of Interpol, visited Athens at the beginning of this month to press the Interior Ministry's case, which rests on a three-year prison sentence, passed in absentia, for the issue of a bad cheque for \$50,000. Egypt and Greece are bound by an extradition treaty.

Before her escape, Abdel-Moneim, known as the 'iron lady', ran a land-developing company called Hedeco. She reportedly collected millions of pounds from would-be buyers of apartments in buildings which her company was constructing. But instead of delivering the apartments to the buyers or re-investing them, she fled the country, reportedly with the help of a senior official.

At Egypt's request, the Greek authorities ordered the woman to be remanded in custody for 20 days, and an Athens court began hearings to decide whether she should be returned to serve her prison term and face further investigation in Egypt.

Giving evidence before the three-man court, the woman, speaking in English, denied that her name was Hoda Abdel-Moneim and claimed that she was Safiya Mohamed Sallam. Also claiming that she was Christian, she said she had left Egypt at the age of four and had not set foot on Egyptian soil for the past 40 years. She alleged that the Egyptian authorities were hounding her because she donates \$1 million annually to Egyptian churches.

The woman said that she had been educated in the United States and then came to Athens where she started five shipping companies, employing as many as 1,750 Greek workers and earning the Greek government an annual \$19 million profit.

One of her two Greek lawyers presented the court with a copy of a birth certificate, bearing the name of Safiya Mohamed Sallam, which had been endorsed by the Egyptian Foreign Ministry and the Egyptian Embassy in Athens.

However the appearance of Interpol's El-Roubi as a witness for the prosecution seems to have exposed her story as a fabrication. He told the court that Safiya Mohamed Sallam was in fact the wife of the janitor of a building owned by Abdel-Moneim in Heliopolis. El-Roubi presented the court with a death certificate showing that this woman had died in 1994. He also presented an Egyptian forensic report stating that the fingerprints of Abdel-Moneim and the detained woman were identical.

El-Roubi's appearance in court clearly took the woman by surprise and she wept openly. Her lawyers attempted to cast doubt on El-Roubi's testimony by citing the evidence of the birth certificate in the name of Sallam, and the woman insisted to the court: "I am a businesswoman who has been unjustly jailed. I demand to be released because my companies have stopped functioning, which threatens the future of 1,750 Greek workers."

After a brief recess, the court decided to remand the woman in custody for 20 more days, during which a decision would be reached on whether she should be extradited to Egypt.

Iron and steel scenes

The battle over trade unions has always had a special flavour in Helwan, because the area includes the country's largest state-owned factories and is known as a hotbed for political activism for various political groups, mainly leftists and the illegal Muslim Brotherhood.

Most of the Helwan factories are not included in the government's privatisation plan because of their strategic importance and the large investments involved. As a result, this election battle has focused on personalities, candidates' political background and the services they could provide to workers.

Tight security measures were imposed from the early hours of Tuesday morning to ensure that the election day would pass safely. But procedures did not go as scheduled and ballot boxes were opened at least four hours late,

making it impossible for at least 30 per cent of the workers to cast their ballots.

Faseeh El-Gabri, a candidate for the trade union committee, said that workers in the third shift, from 10.30pm to 7am, had to wait until 11am to cast their votes. And because the start was delayed, they left without voting. Public relations officials at the factory blamed the delay on officials from the Ministry of Manpower who arrived late to monitor the elections. They also blamed transport problems and traffic-clogged streets. Thus, a last minute decision was taken to extend voting hours until 7.30pm, instead of 5pm as originally scheduled.

The 22,000 workers at the Iron and Steel Complex had to choose a 19-member trade union committee out of 219 candidates and also elect two worker representatives on the board of directors out of 17 candidates.

What caused most complaints among workers was the complexity of the balloting card — a 40cm by 20cm paper. Only three days before the vote, a new system was introduced, dividing the company into 15 departments. Workers had to choose between one and four candidates from each.

"This is a balloting paper for doctors and engineers, and not simple workers like ourselves," one voter said. The paper listed the names of all 219 candidates in fine print. A very small box beside each name had to be ticked by the voter wishing to choose him. "More than 50 per cent of the votes will be invalid," predicted Ali Ibrahim Mahmoud, another candidate. "The illiteracy rate among workers here is higher than 50 per cent, and I am sure that even educated workers would make mistakes."

Due to the complexity of the balloting

paper, workers could take at least 10 minutes to make their choices. This led to further delays and long queues in front of the 50 balloting stations spread throughout the sprawling factory.

Gad El-Haq Taha Mahmoud, a candidate, complained that the management had refused a demand to allow worker representatives to attend the count. "We did not want representatives of all 219 candidates to be at the count, but we could have chosen three or four to represent us so that we would feel totally sure about the results," he said.

Most candidates for the trade union committee belonged to one of three major trends: leftists and members of the Tagammu Party; Muslim Brotherhood sympathisers; and candidates supported by the factory's management. The latter became known to the workers as the "services list", because their campaign

focused on their ability to provide better services to workers as a result of their close links to management.

Tagammu and Muslim Brotherhood sympathisers distributed leaflets, exchanging accusations of corruption and other malpractices. Members of Tagammu made some major gains in the last union election in 1992, but judging by workers interviewed this year, they were not expected to achieve a similarly good result.

One of the main Muslim Brotherhood figures running for a seat on the trade union committee is Mohamed Fath El-Bab, a member of parliament. A Muslim Brotherhood sympathiser told *Al-Ahram Weekly* he expected the group to make greater gains than in the previous elections "because of the services we offer to the workers."

Al-Ahram: A Diwan of contemporary life

On 3 March 1902, two small newspapers, *Himarat Muryati* (The Donkey of my Desire) owned by Mohammed Effendi Tawfiq and *El-Baba Ghaliya* owned by Abdel Maguid Kamel, featured a photograph of the Mufti of Egypt, Sheikh Mohamed Abdou, dressed as a dancer and dancing with a European woman. The picture was captioned by a satirical poem. The occasion for satire was Sheikh Abdou's recent "Transvaal fatwa" (religious ruling) permitting some individuals in the Transvaal "to wear hats in the performance of their duties." When it came to light that the photograph was a fake, made using superimposition, it precipitated an outcry that would not only affect the owner of *Himarat Muryati*, but would also have significant bearings on the freedom of the press. For its part, *Al-Ahram* was quick to censure Mohamed Tawfiq. However, it did not go as far as others who asked for the re-enactment of the Law of Publications which had been suspended eight years previously in 1894.

Al-Ahram's coverage of this incident began on 7 March 1902 when it reported that the inhabitants of Al-Darb Al-Ahmar "had submitted a petition to the public prosecutor's office-altering them to the poem published in *Himarat Muryati* that mocked the character of His Eminence Sheikh Mohamed Abdou, Mufti of Egypt." The Mufti himself also filed a complaint with the prosecution in response to which it summoned the owner for questioning.

Al-Ahram also received a letter signed by 30 Cairene notables. The letter held that the defamation of the character of the Mufti was contemptible and, moreover, the writer of the satirical poem "included Qur'anic verses in an inappropriate context which constituted an affront to the faith."

Reaction reached the hall of the General Assembly where, in the session of 16 March, one of the members, Amin Bek Al-Shamsi, said, "We see the most despicable people these days setting up newspapers to spread their foulness and their assault on decency and virtue. I therefore propose that this assembly ask the government to pass a general law of the press in order to protect the people from this chaos and to punish those who transgress."

Al-Ahram declared its approval of "this worthy demonstration, as it is proof of the feelings of the nation and its zeal to protect the dignity of its distinguished leaders and ulemas." At the same time, however, it expressed its hopes that "the matter will end here and that his excellency the Mufti will forgive and that the owner of the newspaper will forswear such actions in the future. This is far preferable to a trial and all that it entails, particularly since what appears in such a satirical paper should not generally be taken too seriously."

Al-Ahram's appeal for moderation was most likely motivated by the voices in the General Assembly calling for measures to restrict the freedom of the press. However, its appeals went unheeded as the public prosecutor went ahead with proceedings to bring the owner of *Himarat Muryati* to trial. On 1 April the court found Tawfiq guilty

151

Himarat Muryati, which literally means 'the donkey of my desire'

sounds like the title of a comic or satirical book, article or poem. Not so in early 20th century Egypt: it was the name of a newspaper. That newspaper belonged to a family of small-time, privately-owned, poorly-edited publications which thrived on scandal and mud-slinging without bothering about principle in their quest for money and advantage. Their proliferation led to demands for government measures to restrict the freedom of the press.

Dr Yunan Labib Rizq tells the story in this instalment of his tales of Egyptian life as mirrored by *Al-Ahram*.

and sentenced him to three months in prison. Four days later, the court pronounced its verdict against the owner of *Al-Baba Ghaliya* who it sentenced to "six months imprisonment. As the cell doors closed behind the two newspapermen, the doors to the question of freedom of the press were flung wide open. The matter had been at issue before, but not with the potential gravity with which it posed itself in the wake of this incident.

When the old law of the press was rescinded, there was a rapid spread of small privately-owned newspapers. Most of these newspapers were not up to the task of educating the public to which they ostensibly pledged themselves. Their owners were an odd collection of individuals, some of whom saw journalism as a vocation rather than a mission. For others, it was a means for the extortion of individuals or groups, the sort of journalism that has acquired the epithet "the yellow press", though *Al-Ahram* had another name for it: "the renegade press."

This satirical period saw a sharp polarisation in the camps of Egyptian political opinion. On the one side was the British High Commission at Dubara Palace, the symbol of the occupation, supported by the pro-British *Al-Muqattam* newspaper. A second camp was symbolised by the Supreme Porte, supported in various degrees by the nationalist newspapers *Al-Ahram* and *Al-Mu'ayyid*. Abdin Palace in the reign of the Khedive Abbas II represented a third camp of opinion. This khedive was the target of insinuated or overt attacks of *Al-Muqattam* and supported by *Al-Ahram* and *Al-Mu'ayyid*. Finally, there was the camp which supported increasing French influence, which *Al-Ahram* had consistently championed, as did *Al-Liwa* during its first five years. The smaller newspapers fluctuated between the various camps

according to how they perceived their interests could best be served.

While the smaller newspapers were bribed by the occupation authorities in a blatant fashion, the larger newspapers, foremost among them *Al-Muqattam*, received different forms of indirect support. One of the most common was to grant these newspapers access to information that was withheld from the public for its excessive severity.

Generally, however, these newspapers' manoeuvrings were less noble and not infrequently precipitated serious reactions. On one occasion, *Al-Ahram* published a letter it had received from one such newspaper owner. The owner confessed that the reason his newspaper lauded Riyad Pasha and attacked *Al-Ahram* was "only to obtain some money from the prime minister who rewards every newspaper that attacks you." On another occasion, *Al-Ahram* cautioned its readers against these newspapers, the owners of which it branded as "hypocrites, deceivers and frauds." It also rebuked some foreign language newspapers published in Egypt, such as the *Egyptian Gazette*, for "giving far more weight to what these small, newly-established Arabic newspapers say than they merit. Intelligent readers of the Arabic press, both Egyptians and others, unanimously condemn such contemptuous slander, especially when directed at individuals who are far above any such calumny."

The case of *Himarat Muryati* forced everyone in the newspaper business to put their cards on the table. The "renegade" newspapers grew ever more impudent. Epitomising these were the *Photograph* owned by Mitwalli Effendi Azmi and *Al-Khala'a* (Licentiousness) the name of which tells all. The *Photograph* ran afoul of a dignitary whose name is not revealed by *Al-Ahram*. Mitwalli Azmi was tried on 1 February 1904 in Shubra District Court, found guilty and

sentenced to six months prison and a fine of 1,200 piastres. Although it is not explicitly stated, one surmises from the news report that he had been prosecuted on charges of defamation of character and extortion. *Al-Khala'a's* case is clearer, given the exposure it was given in several successive *Al-Ahram* editions. The proceedings against the owner took place in Sayeda Zeinab Court on 20 February 1904 on charges of defaming the honour of members of the Darammali family.

The star witness in this trial was a certain Gamil Effendi Fahmi who testified that the owners of the newspaper had used his services as a go-between with the Darammali family in order to extort money from them for the newspaper to keep silent. The court sentenced both newspaper owners to lengthy prison terms.

The *Photograph* and *Al-Khala'a* were not alone in this domain. *Al-Ahram* is replete with numerous similar cases, the most important of which involved the famous Egyptian revolutionary leader, Ahmed Orabi, after his return from exile. Described by *Al-Ahram* as "the man who had once been a pasha", Orabi brought a case against the owner of *Al-Ahram* newspaper on charges of slander. The owner was acquitted by the court. It is curious that *Al-Ahram* in its coverage of this incident appeared to sympathise with the defendant rather than the defendant's victim. Perhaps Bichara Tagla still had vivid memories of how his newspaper suffered at the hands of the Orabi supporters over twenty years previously.

The frequency of these cases and the detention of numerous journalists behind bars brought two issues to the fore. The first was the cause of establishing a journalists syndicate to offer some shield of protection from others and from themselves; the second concerned the increasing calls to restrict what was considered the excessive freedom the members of the press had enjoyed during the previous decade.

Al-Ahram had long been interested in founding a journalists union, though comment on this regard appeared only intermittently on its pages. At the end of 1895 it appealed for "a newspaper syndicate", which, "if it is of only 10 per cent service to the newspapers, it will be of 90 per cent service to the readers, for the powers that be will learn how to show the necessary respect for public opinion whose primary mouthpiece is the press."

Several days after this article appeared, *Al-Ahram* expressed its disappointment that "the owners of other newspapers have remained deaf to our appeal." It added: "However, we will not despair of reaching this goal in the future." It was a theme *Al-Ahram* would repeat frequently over subsequent years.

Curiously it was the smaller Arabic language newspapers that began to call upon each other to exercise restraint. Odder yet was the fact that the campaign to restrict the liberty of the press in Egypt was championed by some British newspapers. Foremost among these was the *London Times* which said, "The nationalist newspapers of Egypt should have some of their rights taken

away because they represent a source of danger to national security." *Al-Ahram* was not about to remain silent over this imputation and devoted a series of articles to the question of the freedom of the press.

In one article it said, "The secret behind Great Britain's progress is in great part due to the contribution of the British press to advancing the activities of that nation, which affords us the opportunity to assert that the freedom of the press has assisted the success of that nation." In a subsequent article it attempts to define the concept of criticism. Unfortunately, it says, "The Orient is unfamiliar with this word unless it is tainted with slander and defamation. It has yet to comprehend that criticism is a means for reform through admonition and a form of compassion offered through advice."

The newspaper was distressed to find that some of the most influential writers in Egypt were advocating introducing a new law to "encumber our pen with more fetters and restraints." It agreed with the opinion of many who said that "we should be contemptuous of every writer who stoops to insolence and obscenity and whose pen cannot aspire beyond the ignoble assault on decent people's honour and base insolence against those of lofty stature." But at the same time it reasoned, "Would it not be wiser to conceive of a means to silence the tongues of the insolent and the pens of the parasites rather than to impinge upon the freedom which we enjoy."

The issue of freedom of the press had developed such urgency that the British high commissioner began to include a section devoted to this topic in his yearly reports. This section in his 1904 report was particularly lengthy. It included a list of the most important journalists who had been prosecuted and sentenced over the previous year: Bayoumi Ibrahim, owner of *Al-Tamihil*, Mohammed Abbas, owner of *Al-Khala'a*, Abdel-Maguid Helmi, owner of *Al-Baba Ghaliya*, Hussein Tawfiq, owner of *Al-Ahram*, Mohamed A. Tawfiq, owner of *Himarat Muryati* and Ahmed Mitwalli, owner of the *Photograph*. Cromer attributed this phenomenon to the rise in the journalists' use of the threat of public exposure to extort money. He said that this rise had been particularly prevalent among some of the owners of Egyptian newspapers who were of lower class origins. Those who seek to earn their living in this manner, he concluded, were "a plague to society."

The famous Lord Cromer was quick to add, however, "Whatever faults one finds in the local newspapers, some of them play an important part in educating the nation." Unfortunately, the pummelling the national press received at the hands of its critics augured ill for the cause of freedom of the press. Indeed the measures to restrict it began that same year, 1904.

The author is a professor of history and head of Al-Ahram History Studies Centre.



MENA III

Business against the political odds

Working against a turbulent political backdrop, the ministry of foreign affairs is calmly going ahead with all the details of preparations for the Middle East North Africa economic conference. Raouf Saad, deputy foreign minister for regional cooperation, is in charge of co-ordinating with other government and public sector agencies the Egyptian projects to be presented to the conference. He represents Egypt in the special committee currently overseeing the establishment of the regional bank and business council. In an interview with Al-Ahram Weekly, Saad said that the Cairo conference will give precedence to business over politics and will reflect significant changes in the international, Arab and Egyptian economic and political arenas.

Why has Egypt decided to go ahead with the economic conference, despite the heavy political odds against it? It is a decision, it is a commitment. We are a country which respects its obligations. The conference, as the president announced, will be held on time. Preparations are being finalised.

How do you expect the Cairo conference to be different from Casablanca and Amman?

I think it will be different in many aspects. The first concerns the political atmosphere in which the summit is taking place. The summit mechanism is part of the peace process and that is the reason why so many questions have been raised asking whether the conference will take place against the background of the setbacks in the peace process over the past two months.

All efforts are now being intensified in order to rescue the peace process and put it on the right track in order to provide a better environment for the discussions, debates, and contacts that will take place during the conference.

The second difference which will be felt in Cairo is that the concept of regional cooperation is changing and acquiring a larger dimension. Casablanca was a very special conference in that it was the first time an international conference encompassed Arabs and Israelis meeting in an Arab country.

It was a signal that under peace, Israel was being accepted not only as a political entity, but also as an economic partner in the region. Here, peace would mean that parties are all equal, that there would be no exception, and no special treatment for any party and that the peace process is not a hostage to this or that party.

In this respect, Israel does not necessarily have to be part of all regional cooperation plans, and the summit process does not hinge upon the political situation in Israel. The only prerequisite for

The Cairo conference will give prominence to inter-Arab relations and the role of the private sector in regional cooperation. Ghada Ragab interviews the deputy foreign minister for regional cooperation on the logic behind the preparations for the summit.

a full regional cooperation is a comprehensive peace.

Regional cooperation is acquiring a wider definition, opening new horizons for inter-Arab cooperation. I think it is very important to remember that the absence of peace has forced the Arab countries to exhaust almost all their resources on the Arab-Israeli conflict. Their decisions, including economic ones, were influenced by the conflict.

Therefore, the absence of peace has effectively delayed solutions for the Arab economic problems and Arab economic schemes for cooperation.

I believe that the political implications of the Arab summit last June received enough attention, but if one reads the declaration, one can detect a notable change of tone; a dynamic interaction between politics and economics. While the summit confirmed that peace is an irreversible strategic choice, it also reflected the new mentality for Arab cooperation.

The first signal is the decision of the Arabs to establish the Arab free trade area. But this time it is not a mere political reaction, taken only to serve political needs but a business choice aimed at exploiting Arab resources through decisions made on the basis of economic feasibility.

There is considerable economic transformation taking place in the Arab countries. There are wide-ranging economic reforms that are taking place—take the example of Egypt—regulatory reforms, financial reforms, the offering of strategic projects to the private sector.

The private sector is playing a leading role in developing economic relations between Arab countries and in enabling the Arab region to face the challenges that are coming with the new international trading system, with the GATT agreements, with the global shift to market economies. The world economy is changing and this highlights the dangers that the Arabs could face if they do not form a coherent regional grouping.

The Cairo conference is taking place in a rather different Middle East than the previous two summits. Regional cooperation itself is no longer a new concept, but the existence of regional cooperation is by itself a signal of peace.

The fact that there is peace reflects well on the individual countries. It means that international investors can come and invest not only in regional projects, but also in national projects in the individual countries.

In Cairo, we will be drawing on experiences of the past two conferences. We learned from the lessons of Casablanca and Amman that these conferences should be devoted to the business community, and that is why we have introduced a new arrangement to ensure that business contacts take place in an organised manner.

We will have what we call a match-making process, in which all participants will have information about other participants in advance.

At the conference, participants can go to a special office where they can ask to meet a certain person and the secretariat will fix an appointment. This is a major aspect which will distinguish the Cairo summit.

We believe it is the private sector that will lead the promotion of economic relations. The business community, knowing that peace is a prerequisite for cooperation, will serve as pressure groups, to support the governments to go for peace and to advise their governments if they divert from the peace track.

In the previous two conferences, many of the participating countries, including Egypt, presented large numbers of projects in an effort to attract potential investors. However, only a handful of regional projects were ever discussed. Is Egypt planning a new approach this year?

We have made a decision that, in the case of projects, quantity is of no importance. We brought professional experts to prepare the projects in a precise manner, which would give investors just enough information to make them curious to research the project further. So the major difference this year is in terms of the way the projects have been prepared.

What happened to the projects which were presented in the previous two summits?

This year we have a few of the old projects but they have been prepared in a different way. We have dropped the ones which will not serve a purpose and do not need any foreign investors.

How many projects will the Egyptian book include?

We are talking about 60 projects. This year they will include not only production-related projects, but also a new dimension of research and development. It has projects for research, for high tech, and projects to meet possible hazards in

the region such as earthquakes. We are introducing scientific cooperation for the first time this year. There are common dangers that the region is facing and which need the cooperation of all the parties.

Which projects do you expect will attract the most attention?

This year we have a new category of projects, which reflects the extent of conceptual change in economic thinking in Egypt. Earlier this year, the government, for the first time, allowed the private sector to invest in infrastructure, under the Build, Own, Operate and Transfer (BOOT) and the Build, Operate and Transfer (BOT) schemes. My expectation is that the BOOT projects which are being introduced will attract most investors. We are presenting projects in infrastructure, transport, power and irrigation.

Will the conference be reviewing projects which were discussed in Amman?

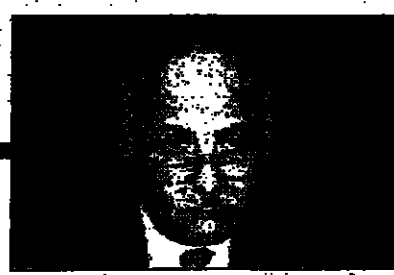
Yes, we hope to review the progress that has been achieved in these projects. Among these is the electricity grid, which connects Egypt, Israel, Jordan and the Palestinian Authority. The scheme is planned to be connected with other electricity grids that could include Turkey and maybe other European countries.

There is also the gas pipeline, which depends mainly on Egypt's ability to export gas to its neighbours. The pipeline goes from Egypt to Israel, Jordan and the Palestinian Authority and there are negotiations that it might go to Turkey later.

Studies concerning these two projects have already been undertaken by consultancy firms and they could possibly be starting a phase of implementation in three to four years. These kinds of projects are long term by definition so they fit very much into the peace environment. They are a kind of preparation in anticipation of peace.

There are other fast-track projects which will be presented. They are mainly transport-related projects. In a region where you are rebuilding after war, transport projects are vital because they not only link the region together, but also provide the infrastructure for real cooperation.

Another category which we will discuss in Cairo represents what we call development-integrated projects. Among these is a project to develop the area of Taba-Eilat-Aqaba, through tourism activities, economic zones and handicraft centres.



The second is the south-east Mediterranean project which includes Egypt, Israel, Jordan and the Palestinian Authority. There are plans for tourism activities, agro-industries, fisheries and a Riviera-type road that would serve the Palestinian Authority as it would connect the region between El-Arish, Gaza and Ashdod.

Why are none of the regional institutions established during the Amman summit last year operational yet?

As you know, much progress has been made on these institutions to date. In the case of the Middle East Development Bank, all negotiations have been completed. The agreement of the bank has been finalised and has been deposited with the UN since 28 August and is open for signature by the 19 founders as well as for new members. We have received an official request from China to join the bank and its request has been supported by the regional parties as well as most of the founding members. Its admission is expected to be finalised at the first meeting of the task force in charge of the bank.

The only problem keeping the bank from proceeding now is that we are still awaiting the result of the consultations going on between the US administration and Congress.

According to constitutional procedure in the US the administration has to get the authorisation of Congress to be able to join the bank and obtain funding to pay the US share of 21 per cent of the bank's capital, which amounts to \$52 million annually for five years. The administration is rather determined to go ahead with the bank and they are exerting intensive efforts with Congress to get its agreement.

But the US under-secretary of commerce, during a recent visit to Cairo, said it was unlikely that the administration would be able to win the approval of Congress while the election campaign is going on.

It is a real problem. If the US does not sign the agreement, it would weaken the credibility of the bank to start without a large shareholder. That is why we are waiting. The bank is on hold until Con-

gress gives its authorisation. After that we will proceed. We have prepared all the logistics for the transitional team which will be working in Cairo to oversee the establishment of the bank. We are expecting the bank to come into operation by November 1997.

Is it true that Egypt walked out of the recent meeting of the second regional institution, the Middle East Mediterranean Travel and Tourism Association?

What happened in MEMTTA is that the board of governors met the same day troubles started in Jerusalem. The Palestinian delegation declared at the beginning that they would not participate, which meant there was no quorum for the meeting. The Egyptian delegation insisted that the meeting could not go on without the Palestinians.

Otherwise MEMTTA has enjoyed considerable progress. It is waiting only for notification by the regional parties of their acceptance of the charter. This has not happened yet. We have to go through constitutional procedures to get the approval of the parliaments. In the case of Egypt parliament is currently out of session, but technically the MEMTTA is ready.

Once you have the charter in place and you have the association working from its headquarters in Tunisia, tourism by itself is an easy product to sell under peace. We expect that it will be in operation early next year.

The Regional Business Council (RBC), I understand, is having difficulty taking off?

Technically, there are no problems with the RBC, but politically we have been unable to proceed with the council under the circumstances.

The RBC is one of the institutions which demonstrate the close inter-linkage between the peace process and regional cooperation, because it is designed to promote trade and investment. It was established by the private sector and will belong to the private sector. There will be no official participation.

We have been unable to get the steering committee of this council to meet simply because there is no way to force the private sector to participate. This was particularly clear in the case of the Palestinian private sector.

They said they could not accept the fact that they were going to sit with the other regional parties and discuss how to promote trade while on a daily basis they face closures and restrictions by Israel on the movement of goods and labour.

This highlighted how a delay in the peace process could negatively affect regional cooperation and how its progress could positively affect regional cooperation.

Tariffs draw cheer and fears

A decree reducing tariffs on imported products has local producers concerned about losing their competitive edge. Mona El-Fiqi reports

In a move aimed at securing IMF approval for a new standby-credit arrangement, the government this month cut tariffs by 10-25 per cent.

The cut effectively reduces the highest rate for goods other than cars and luxury goods from 70 to 55 per cent and knocks the premium tariff rate down from 160 to 135 per cent.

While for consumers and some industry representatives, the government's decision has drawn cheers, others like local automobile industry representatives are concerned that the new tariffs will cut into their sales over the coming period.

Abdel-Moneim Seoudi, chairman of Suzuki, Egypt, said that the decree would lead to a reduction in automobile prices in general, but the impact will be particularly reflected in the price of small vehicles.

"With these kinds of tariff reductions, it may be hard for some car manufacturers to survive, given that they rely on im-

ported components," he said. Hence, the need for a similar reduction in tariffs on raw materials and components.

According to other Egyptian producers, the new tariffs will sufficiently narrow the difference in price between local and imported goods, to the detriment of local producers.

What the government should have done, they argued, is lower tariffs on raw materials used in local industries in order to bring down the price of domestically-produced goods and thus increase their competitiveness.

"Over the last few years, many Egyptian products have equaled imported goods in terms of quality and undercut them in terms of price," said Mahmoud El-Arabi, head of the Egyptian Federation of Chambers of Commerce. "As a result, consumers opted to purchase locally-made products."

But with the new tariff cuts which have

not been matched by a reduction in duties on raw materials, noted El-Arabi, Egyptian products may lose their competitive edge and witness a drop in sales that will affect many Egyptian industries, especially small and micro enterprises, and their workers.

"If these industries are losing money, they will be forced to lay off a large number of workers, and this will neither benefit the government nor the workers and consumers," El-Arabi said.

Consequently, in a memo presented last week to Mohamed El-Gharbi, the minister of finance, El-Arabi requested a 20 per cent reduction in tariffs on raw materials and components used in local industries. The current tariff on these raw materials and components ranges from 5 to 30 per cent.

Explaining the government's move, Mustafa Zaki, secretary-general of the Cairo Chamber of Commerce, noted that

in accordance with the terms of the EU partnership and GATT agreements, the Egyptian government is obliged to lower customs duties in order to encourage imports.

But the government maintains that there remains a sufficient disparity between prices of imported and local goods despite the reductions carried out under the new decree.

Zaki, however, believes that "this difference in price is not enough to protect local goods and, therefore, local producers must reduce their profit margin so that their products remain competitive with imported goods."

"The burden of the third phase of the economic reform programme will be shouldered by the local producers," added Zaki. "They will have to endure the problems resulting from the new decree."

To lighten this burden, he suggested, the government should reduce some of

the other liabilities local producers face such as taxes.

Other industry representatives, such as those dealing in gold, however, stand to benefit from the new decree. Under its provisions, the tariffs on imported gold ingots have been reduced from five to one per cent.

"This decree will encourage gold producers to import gold ingots and manufacture them," said Sherif El-Sergani, a gold dealer. "As a result, the local industry will flourish. Moreover, the decree will also prevent gold smuggling."

Consumers, he added, will also be able to buy cheaper gold since the price of each gram of gold will be reduced by nearly LE1.

Another Cairo jewellery shop owner explained that since the tariff on imported manufactured gold is still 40 per cent plus another 20 per cent in other duties, local industries will not be jeopardised.

Market report

Sleepy week, deals down

IT WAS A relatively tame week on the Egyptian stock exchange as brokers continued to grapple with the complexities of the newly implemented central depository system. Moreover, the absence of any new offerings in state-owned

enterprises also contributed to the generally dull week of trading which ended with the General Market Index closing at 234.2, a 0.29 point drop from its opening level. The value of transactions witnessed a sharp drop, falling from LE266.95 the week before to LE64.2 million this week.

Trading in the shares of milling companies was varied. While the South Cairo and Giza Mills and Bakeries Company led the market in terms of value and volume of transactions, trading LE11.22 million in shares, the value of its stock lost LE3 to close at LE32 per share.

On the other hand, shares of the East Delta Mills Company gained LE5 to close at LE39.5.

The financial and real estate sector's index also took a turn for the worse, slipping

by 0.48 points to level off at 283.63 points. News that France's Societe Generale had acquired 51 per cent of the National Societe Generale Bank pushed the latter's share value up by LE5. The shares closed at LE480.

Medinet Nasr for Housing and Development's stock increased in value by LE4 to close at LE15, while those of the Cairo Housing and Urbanisation Company lost 14.21 of their opening price and closed at LE17.93.

The Medical Professionals for Pharmaceutical's shares, on the other hand, registered a 28 per cent increase in value and peaked at LE32.

Trading in bonds, as usual, was minimal in relation to shares, with only LE2.24 million in the securities changing hands.

In all, the shares of 20 companies increased in value, 28 lost ground and 22 remained unchanged.

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Facility agreement

THE AFRICAN Export-Import Bank (AFREXIMBANK) last week signed a five million dollar facility agreement with Merchant Banking Corporation Nigeria, Limited (MBCN). The facility will be mainly directed to financing trade in manufactured goods.

Addressing attendees at the signing ceremony, Kamal El-Kheshen, head of the operations division of the AFREXIMBANK, pointed out that the facility's significance is that the inputs of the manufactured goods to be financed will originate from regional markets, and the finished products will primarily be heading for African countries. As such, it will help promote intra-African trade.

This latest move is part and parcel of the bank's drive to encourage foreign investors to formalise deals with African banks. The Cairo-based AFREXIMBANK was established in 1993 by a number of African countries and regional and international investors to facilitate, promote and expand trade both inside and outside of Africa. This agreement was the third AFREXIMBANK signed with a bank from Nigeria, whose government is AFREXIMBANK's largest shareholder.

The recipient of the facility, MBCN, is a joint venture operation between Banque Paribas and a small group of Nigerian investors, and was one of the few local banks that survived Nigeria's financial crisis in the early 1990s.

Arab-EU talks


EXPERTS from eight Mediterranean rim countries met last week to discuss the proposed technical framework for a Euro-Mediterranean free trade zone.

The talks, which also included discussions on the form and nature of inter-Arab cooperation required to establish this zone, aimed at adopting a protocol on common rules of origin for manufactured goods in a manner best suited to the economic and industrial structure of the Arab countries entering into partnerships with the EU.

"Such a protocol is expected to be finalised by the time the Arab Mediterranean states each conclude their respective bilateral partnership agreements with the European Union," said Ambassador Gamal Bayoumi, chief Egyptian negotiator in the Egypt-EU partnership talks. "These agreements are expected to be concluded within two to three years."

To this end, the meeting last week is seen as a key step towards establishing a greater Arab free trade zone, and is the first in a series of consultations which would increase the Arab countries' negotiating capabilities with the EU side, he added.

Participating in the meeting were Egypt, Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan, Tunisia, Morocco, the European Commission and Israel. According to Bayoumi, a Libyan delegation attended the meeting but did not participate in the discussions.



Les Talibans au ban des nations

Crue du Nil
Le risque de pénurie derrière l'abondance

Négociations Israélo-palestiniennes
Un fossé difficile à combler

Diplomatie régionale
Le primat aux Sommets

Afghanistan
Les Talibans au ban des nations

En vente tous les mercredis

Les imprimeries du 6 Octobre
Al-Ahram entre au XXI^e siècle

Logement
Problème n° 1 des jeunes

Rédacteur en Chef
Exécutif
Mohamed Salmawy

Président
et Rédacteur en Chef
Ibrahim Nafie



Al-Ahram photo and a photo from the Israeli newspaper. These photos may never have been shot, had the Dakkar succeeded in carrying out its assignment. Three months before, Egyptian Missile Boat 613 (left) sank the Israeli destroyer, Eilat

The sinking of the Dakkar

On the evening of 20 October 1967, a missile boat of the Egyptian Navy, departing from Port Said Naval Base on the Mediterranean coast, intercepted and sank the Israeli destroyer Eilat. The following January, another of the Israeli navy's crucial vessels, the submarine Dakkar, was lost offshore from Alexandria. How the submarine was lost, and where its wreck lies has remained a mystery. **Galal Nassar** pieces together the full story of the sinking of the Dakkar, and, with the testimony of retired naval officers, is able to shed new light on its fate

On 25 January 1968, at exactly 8am, staff at the Israeli naval base at Haifa were waiting for a routine radio message from the Israeli submarine Dakkar. The submarine, a new addition to the Israeli fleet, was en route from Britain, where it had been overhauled, to Haifa, with a crew of 69 on board.

Haifa never received that message. Nothing more was heard from the submarine, and, despite mammoth efforts on the part of Israel and several international agencies, the story of its final hours has never been pieced together, and the wreck of the submarine has never been located. The official announcement of the disappearance of the Dakkar, somewhere off the Egyptian coast, was made by Israeli Defence Minister Moshe Dayan before the Israeli Knesset on 6 March 1968.

Israel had bought the Dakkar as part of its strategy to achieve naval supremacy in the Mediterranean following the Arab defeat in the 1967 June War. It had previously acquired the destroyer Eilat, and considered that a large submarine, of a size and sophistication unprecedented in the Middle East, capable of bombarding Alexandria, would be a major asset to its naval arsenal.

At this time Israel relied heavily on its submarine force to prevent the Egyptian navy from threatening Israeli coastal areas, to defend the newly-acquired Sinai and generally weaken the Egyptian naval presence in the Mediterranean.

The Dakkar was overhauled in Britain — which, at the time, was openly hostile to Egypt under the leadership of President Gamal Abdel-Nasser — to very strict Israeli specifications. It was while this major overhaul was in progress that Israel, still basking in the glow of the 1967 victory, awoke to the news that the Eilat had been sunk by

Egyptian surface-to-surface missiles. The Dakkar then took on an added significance in terms of its possibilities for retaliation against Egypt.



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the new facts came to light in the course of a new investigation ordered by Israeli Defence Minister Isaac Mordechai. Activity reached its height in July of this year, when, according to Israeli accounts, salvage groups carried out four search missions in the region where the Dakkar had disappeared from Israeli radar screens. In the course of this summer's investigations, it was revealed that the Dakkar had received a coded message at midnight on 24 January 1968 from Israeli intelligence. The message was as follows:

— "Base to Dakkar... Base to Dakkar."
— "We read you clearly... Your instructions?"
— "Change course immediately to Dekheila in Alexandria... Target: an Egyptian craft taking part in an Egyptian manoeuvre tomorrow 25 January... We will inform you in a few hours about the position of the craft... Do not enter the port until we specify the position of target. End of message."

That morning, 25 January, the Egyptian Navy was preparing for major manoeuvres offshore from Alexandria. With submarines and 55 other naval vessels taking part, their main object was to boost naval morale and celebrate the sinking of the Eilat. The undisclosed target of that intelligence message was in fact the ship on which — Israeli intelligence knew from reliable sources — Nasser, along with Egyptian naval leaders,

would be watching the naval exercise. The Egyptian president, Mossad had learned, was to inaugurate the manoeuvres himself to congratulate the Egyptian navy on their post-June 1967 achievements.

The captain of the Dakkar asked the base to allow him to return home immediately after ending his mission. The base answered: "Return home on 29 January 1968. Start your journey on 27 January morning... Don't be late... A surprise is waiting for you..." The surprise in question was a festival to celebrate not only the arrival of the most powerful submarine in the Middle East, but also its assassination of Nasser.

This turned out to be the Dakkar's last message. For five days Haifa attempted to make radio contact, and the entire Egyptian intelligence service was co-opted to join the search. On 31 January, Israel officially requested the American, Turkish, Greek, Cypriot, and British navies to assist. On the same day, Britain compensated Israel for its loss by presenting it with a submarine of the same model, the Dolphin.

According to Israeli intelligence, the search revealed nothing, despite a possible lead from a British pilot who reported having seen a huge oil slick and some floating lifebelts in an area around Egypt's northern coast. Defence Minister Moshe Dayan made the decision to stop search operations on 4 February 1968 because the hostile relations between the two countries precluded Israeli entry into Egyptian territorial waters.

The signing of the peace treaty between Egypt and Israel in 1979 gave Israel the opportunity to resume its search, and in the early 1980s Israel asked permission to conduct an underwater search in the region between Bardawil in northern Sinai and Port Said, according to a report in the Israeli newspaper *Yediot Ahronot* in April of this year.

Other reports suggest that Israeli intelligence concluded that the Dakkar was lost between 10 and 60 miles from the Egyptian coast, in the region between Alexandria and Port Said. This was based on the sighting on 1 April 1969, 15 months after the disappearance of the Dakkar, of a floating lifebelt by a fisherman from Khan Yunis in the Gaza Strip. An analysis of the region's currents had led the intelligence service to pinpoint the area as a possible location for the wreck.

At the beginning of 1996, the Israeli Defence Ministry proposed that the task of locating the missing submarine should be put out to tender. A Dutch company won the contract, to be assisted by an Israeli company. However, the matter became the subject of a heated military debate in Israel because the company decided to begin its search off the Greek coast, basing its decision on estimates of the drift caused by currents. Israeli calculations, however, had suggested that the submarine could not be located in that area.

Al-Ahram Weekly has also learned that the same company later searched the seas outside Egyptian territorial waters near Damietta, but again nothing was found.

Israeli press interest in the story began to grow and speculation was rife. At the beginning of April 1996, the Israeli newspaper *Maariv* published an exclusive photo of the naval sonar apparatus, which had detected a rectangular metal object, said to be situated outside Egyptian territorial waters. It was thought, the paper said, to belong to the missing submarine.

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TUNNEL "VISION"

Hussam Ahmed

I really dislike tunnels. To my eyes, they rank among the most loathsome places on earth. Of course this is purely personal. Be that as it may, I still have my reasons for making such a categorical statement.

Tunnels are narrow and claustrophobic. The one I am most familiar with, the Queens Midtown Tunnel in New York, is a perpetual, suffocating traffic jam. Here comes another most objectionable trait of it and all other tunnels. There is no turning back. Whether the tunnel in question opens onto equally congested streets, a mine field, or someone else's holy shrine, once you get yourself stuck in it there is no way back or out. I have an excuse though for getting myself trapped in a narrow, claustrophobic tunnel. It is the shortest route to work and, after all, I am my decision's only victim. This is my excuse.

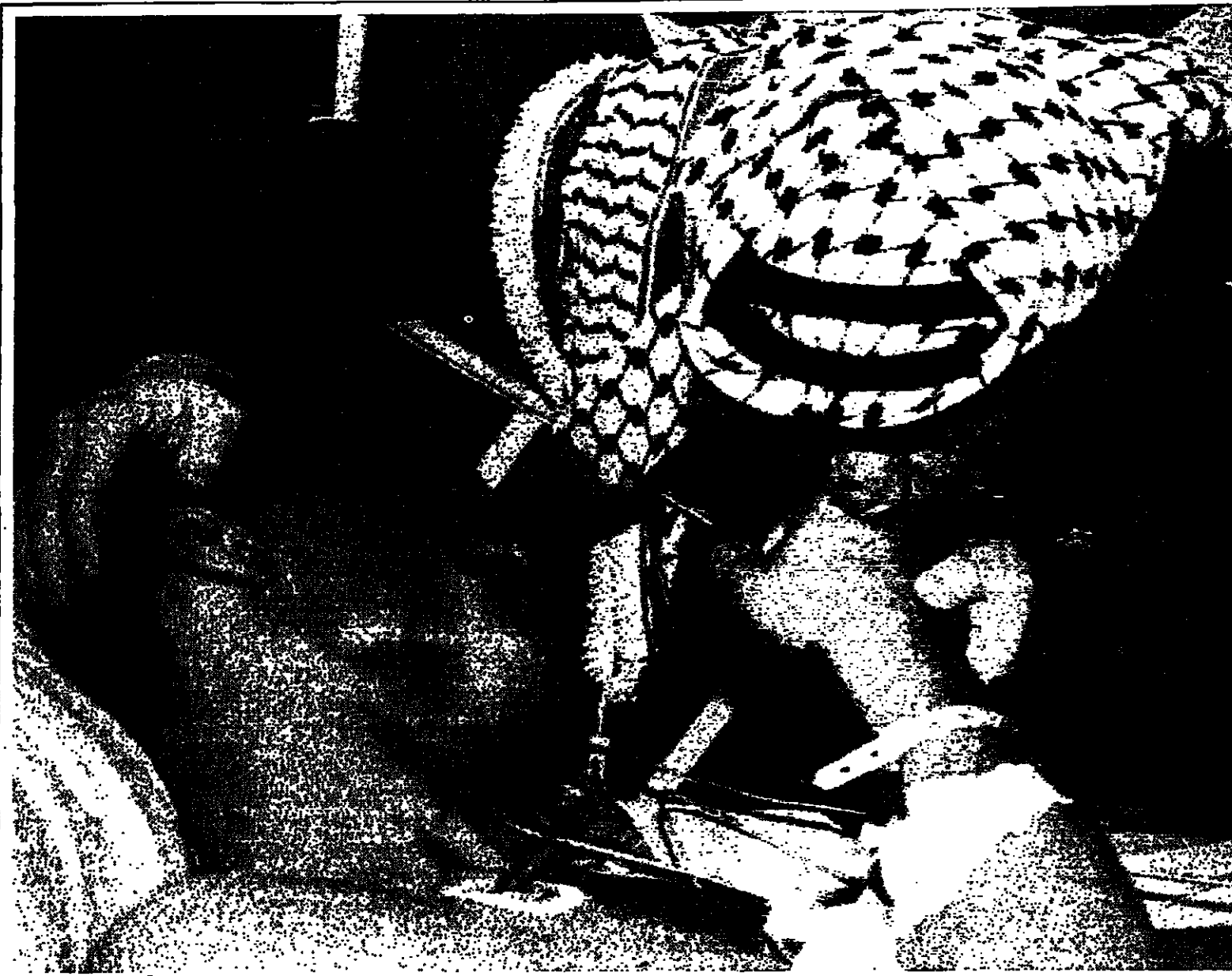
What is Mr Netanyahu's? Yitzhak Rabin, whose Zionist credentials are not open to question save by the Yigal Amir of this world, was an astute politician. As such, he knew that the position most feared by any realistic, mature politician is to find himself inside a tunnel from which there is no turning back or way out. Therefore, he did not open the Hasmonaean tunnel. Not stealthily. Not under cover of darkness. Not with heavy armed guard. Not at all. Like other Israeli prime ministers before and after him, he was well aware that any excuse like "the tunnel being opened in the interest of the Palestinians to bring more tourists and more revenue to the impoverished Arab Quarter of Jerusalem," simply will not fly. Only sparks will. When one is sitting atop a powder keg like the Occupied Territories, the last thing one would want to see is sparks flying. So, Mr Rabin is reported to have said that "a tunnel that has been shut for 2500 years can remain so for a few more until everything else is settled". Not for lack of ideological commitment, but out of sheer political realism. Not Mr Netanyahu's style.

Mr Netanyahu, in the best fashion of tunnel narrowness, declared that the anger at the opening of that infamous tunnel was nothing but a "complete fabrication". He stated that the ensuing riots were the result of 36 hours of "sinister and cynical manipulation" by the Yasser Arafat-controlled media of the Palestinian masses. His oratory (eloquent, and inflammatory as usual) lacks any mention of the reason why his predecessors chose not to tamper with this time bomb. He just prefers to gloss over these questions with generalities such as the tunnel being the "bedrock of our existence" and such like. Generalities that do nothing but stoke the flames without touching on the real life and death questions his decision has brought to the fore.

Mr Netanyahu conveniently chooses to ignore all these questions. The American media, notorious for its aggressive interviewing, elects not to ask them. Because the answer is ready and silencing. To dare ask such questions is to pave the way for the persecution and massacre of the Jews by portraying them as the enemies of humanity and, in this particular case, the enemies of Islam (Mr Netanyahu's words). What a tunnel? And how appropriate that it took nothing but a tunnel to cause the latest devastating explosion in the West Bank and Gaza!

Being himself a prisoner of tunnel mentality, Mr Netanyahu is hardly the best candidate to extricate himself and the whole Middle East peace process from the quagmire he created. Without freeing himself from his own tunnel, it would be impossible for anybody to impress upon him that no South Lawn photo-ops, no hastily-arranged summits, no amount of rubber (or live) bullets can put an end to the catastrophic situation he has put us all in. Only if, and when, Mr Netanyahu is able to get himself out of his ideological, narrow and claustrophobic tunnel could there be any hope of breaking the current impasse.

Much as I dislike tunnels, it has to be admitted that the Hasmonaean tunnel might have at least one redeeming quality. If, as Mr Netanyahu said that tunnel remains "open, and always open" then we will all be deprived of whatever little relief derived from seeing the proverbial light at the end of the tunnel.



Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat kisses the hand of Gaza Strip resident Hussein Audeh Allah. He is one of a dozen Palestinians receiving treatment in Jordan for wounds incurred during clashes with Israeli police in Jerusalem in September (photo: Reuters)

Politics of brinkmanship

Graham Usher interviews a noted Israeli historian on the roots of the recent Palestinian-Israeli confrontation

Ilan Pappé is one of the new generation of Israeli historians who have questioned the received histories of the Israeli state, most notably in his 1994 book, "The Making of the Arab-Israeli Conflict". He is also a member of the Hadash (formerly Communist) Party, the largest non-Zionist party in Israeli politics, with five members in the Knesset.

In an interview with Al-Ahram Weekly, Pappé addresses what he believes are the causes behind and the likely consequences of the recent military confrontations between Israel and Palestinian forces in the West Bank and Gaza.

How do you account for the rapid deterioration in relations between Israel and the Palestinians and the Arab states generally since the Likud government was elected? I think the critical cause is the political make-up of the Likud coalition. The instinct of both Netanyahu and his coalition partners is to prove to Israelis and the world that Oslo was a mistake. This is the only way you explain his government's actions in the three months since Netanyahu assumed office—it is one long series of deliberate provocations towards the Palestinians, of which opening the tunnel in Jerusalem was simply the latest, albeit the most explosive, incident.

These actions have little to do with Netanyahu's stated policy goal of "peace with security". Rather, they aim to expose the futility of Oslo, that it cannot work. My view is that Netanyahu seeks a political crisis with the Palestinians to give him the pretext of re-opening the Oslo agreements, to say to the Palestinians and the Arabs, "Let's go back to square one". This is why Netanyahu stalled for so long over redeployment in Hebron. This is what Likud means when it says to Syria it wants negotiations "without preconditions", that is, negotiations without any Israeli commitment to withdraw eventually from the Golan Heights.

Why is Netanyahu doing this? The only answer is that Netanyahu is much more ideologically

opposed to a resolution of the Palestinian question as anticipated in the Oslo Accords than any of us imagined. Netanyahu is not simply incompetent or an inexperienced politician. He is also a hard-line ideologue—which is much more dangerous.

Are you saying the recent confrontations in the Occupied Territories were intended by Netanyahu?

No, I wouldn't go that far. I think Netanyahu wanted to heat up the territories a little to enable him to stall the Oslo process, especially the redeployment in Hebron. But he didn't anticipate Arafat's reaction. To extend the "fire" metaphor a little further, I think Netanyahu wanted to spark a small fire in the West Bank and Gaza. What he didn't expect was—faced with total paralysis in the peace process—Arafat would pour oil on the flames, that is, if there is to be a fire, then the Palestinians would make sure everyone, including Israeli soldiers, would get burned.

I am not saying that Arafat instructed his police to open fire on Israeli soldiers. I don't think he did. I'm saying that given the composition of the Palestinian police force—made up largely of PLO fighters and Fatah activists—it is wholly predictable that it would fight back in circumstances where Palestinian civilians were being fired upon. That Netanyahu didn't predict this is a measure of his political inexperience and/or incompetence.

Given the international and Arab consensus that has been built on Madrid and the Oslo processes, Netanyahu's efforts to change their terms unilaterally are bound to cause conflict not only with the Palestinians, but with the Arab states. Is he really prepared to take this risk?

I don't know about Netanyahu's intentions. I do know that many Israelis are starting to ready themselves psychologically for war, even though it is a war nobody wants. This, I think, is

the most alarming effect of the recent confrontations.

You feel there is now a drift to war...? Most Israelis are aware that the political leadership in the neighbouring Arab states are pragmatic, none of which seeks war with Israel. And yet the recent deterioration in the Occupied Territories has appeared to revive—in Egypt, Jordan and Syria—a sort of pan-Arabist commitment to the Palestine question. Now why does this revival alarm Israelis so much?

Ever since Begin's electoral victory in 1977, a political consensus has been established here that Israel faces two conflicts, one with the Palestinians and one with the Arab states. There is a dispute among Israelis over whether the Palestinian issue can be resolved, at least in the form of a Palestinian state existing alongside Israel.

But there is little dispute—across most of the Israeli political spectrum—that the conflict with the Arabs is solvable. The dominant view in Israel is that the 1973 war was not over Palestine but over Egypt and Syria's attempts to regain the sovereign territories they had lost in 1967. When, in 1982, Israel tried to destroy the PLO in Lebanon, the Arab world did very little to help the Palestinians. During the Intifada, that world did even less. So most Israelis had drawn the conclusion that Israel's relations with its neighbouring Arab states had, in fact, been decoupled from the Palestinian question.

The recent confrontations have redrawn the link. Mubarak says unless there is progress in Oslo the region faces "catastrophe". King Hussein speaks of his "dark visions" should the peace process collapse. Syria moves its troops in Lebanon. Everyone—including Netanyahu—is suddenly involved in the politics of brinkmanship vis-à-vis the Palestine question. The danger, of course, is that if you go to the brink, it becomes very easy to fall over it. This is why the region—in less than three months—has become so volatile.

Jordan distances itself from Israel

KING Hussein of Jordan made a dramatic gesture of support for Palestinians at this critical stage of negotiations with Israel when he arrived in the West Bank city of Jericho on Tuesday.

Hussein's visit to the West Bank was the first by an Arab head of state to the Palestinian self-rule areas since the 1993 PLO-Israeli Oslo Accords. Hussein and Palestinian President Yasser Arafat had met earlier in the week in the Jordanian capital Amman in an attempt to put pressure on the right-wing government of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to speed up the implementation of the Oslo Accords. The Jordanian monarch then flew Arafat back to the West Bank himself.

"I am happy to have this opportunity to stand next to you here in the land of Palestine," AP quoted the monarch as telling Arafat at a joint press conference after talks in Jericho.

The Jordanian monarch's visit came after Jordan warned earlier in the week that its relations with Israel will be affected if the latter fails to honour the Oslo Accords. Reuters reported that Jordan's ambassador to Israel, Omar Al-Rifai, met Netanyahu's political adviser Doire Gold on Sunday to arrange a high-level meeting this week with Netanyahu to convey the "grave consequences" of Israel's tampering with peace accords. This is a departure from Jordan's previous tolerance towards Israel. Jordan's toughening stance emerged after the recent violence in the Palestinian territories which claimed the lives of 61 Palestinians.

Talabani launches counter-attack

ONCE more the Kurdish enclave in northern Iraq has become the scene of Kurdish fighting. After losing key areas to the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) last September, the Baghdad-based Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP), led by Massoud Barzani, launched a counter-attack to retake the town of Koy Sanjak in northern Iraq.

The attack comes in the wake of the PUK's recapturing of most of the areas formally under its control, notably the stronghold of Sulaimaniya earlier in the week. PUK fighters are said to have stopped short of recapturing Arbil, the capital of the Kurdish enclave.

PUK leader Jalal Talabani told the French news agency AFP from his offices in Sulaimaniya that "there is no political decision to free Arbil". Talabani also told AFP that he did not expect Iraq to intervene.

United Nations officials told the agency that they could not confirm reports spread by the London-based opposition group, the Iraqi National Congress, that Iraqi tanks were stationed outside Arbil. A UN official, however, said that they were told by residents in the area that 300 to 400 tanks had approached southeast of Arbil.

US State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns said that the US will remain neutral in the latest KDP-PUK fighting. A KDP delegation is currently in Washington for talks with State Department officials.

Kuwait's new cabinet

KUWAIT'S new 14-member cabinet was sworn into office by Prince Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah yesterday. On Tuesday, crown prince and prime minister, Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah, announced the composition of his cabinet.

Appointed in the wake of the National Assembly elections, the new cabinet left the foreign affairs, finance and information portfolios in the same hands, the official Kuwaiti news agency KUNA reported. However, seven new faces are featured in the new cabinet, including the defence and oil ministers.

Four elected MPs were given ministerial positions, compared with five in the previous cabinet which also counted 15 members compared to the current 14. The ruling Al-Sabah family continues to hold the key portfolios.

The 14 ministers can all sit and vote in parliament, whether they are elected MPs or not, which provides a further boost to the government's position in the house.

Kuwait's winds of change

Parliamentary elections in Kuwait are over. The real battle now looms over the chair of the coming house speaker to be determined next Sunday. Amira Howeidy reports on the result and challenges ahead of the new parliament

The results of the elections of Kuwait's eighth parliament, announced last week, indicate that the Islamists and their supporters will control half of the new chamber, as 15 of the newly elected representatives are members of Islamic-oriented organisations, while another 10 independent members are expected to rally behind them. The liberal-oriented parliamentary bloc in the previous parliament emerged as the main losers, as they lost six of the 10 seats they occupied in the outgoing parliament, with the result that 40 per cent of parliamentary seats are now occupied by pro-government members.

However, Kuwait's Islamists cannot be expected to form one united bloc. The relationship between the Sunni bloc in the new parliament and some Shi'ite representatives is fraught with tensions, as it was alleged that some Sunni Islamist groups formed unholy electoral alliances to prevent certain Shi'ite candidates from entering the parliament. Hussein Qallaf, a Shi'ite clergyman who studied theology in the Iranian holy city of Qom, and who will be the first MP wearing a traditional Shi'ite black turban and robes to enter the Kuwaiti parliament, won his seat with an overwhelming majority despite strong opposition by Sunni Islamist groups.

Generally speaking, Sunni Islamists (12 out of the 15 Islamist newly elected representatives) tend to be more moderate than those elsewhere in the region, and not as anti-American, if only because they receive extensive

state support and serve in the government. The Shi'ite representatives (2 independents and 3 members of the Shi'ite Islamic Group), however, are expected to be more vocal in their opposition to certain state policies, on both domestic and foreign fronts. Hussein Qallaf told AFP last week that the government and parliament must "decide on a strategy to end the foreign presence in Kuwait". "It is true that 25 MPs are Islamic-oriented, but this term is not interpreted negatively in Kuwait" as it is elsewhere in the Arab world; rather we refer to them as the conservatives who also constitute the majority of the Kuwaiti people," Abdullah Al-Nibari, MP and deputy secretary-general of the left-wing Al-Manbar Al-Dimocrati (The Democratic Forum) told Al-Ahram Weekly.

Kuwait is the only Arab state in the Gulf region boasting a democratic system, and one of the very few in the Arab world that can make that claim. Many see the Kuwaiti democratic process as a test of how a traditional Arab-Islamic society could operate within a democratic framework. Its closest Arab neighbours—Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bahrain, Oman and the United Arab Emirates—are ruled by family dynasties. A few have appointed advisory councils, but none has an elected parliament.

"We voted for our new parliament and we succeeded in this important exam, which everyone is monitoring," said Abdullah Khalifa Al-Shaigi, columnist at Al-Fatan daily newspaper.

"The Kuwaiti people proved that they get what they want through democracy and free choice."

One major drawback in this experiment, however, is that women cannot vote. Neither can a significant proportion of men because of restrictive citizenship laws and a ban on voting by members of the army, police and parts of the civil service. This leaves 15% of the population as the only eligible registered voters, triggering speculation on how far the results will change if all those deprived of the right to vote participated in the elections.

The new parliament, according to Al-Nibari, "is more conservative than the outgoing one" and "less interested in enhancing political rights, including participation. Thus, one should not expect any improvement regarding women's right to vote," he told the Weekly.

Many Kuwaitis express the view that their country is the testing ground for many of the hot issues splitting the Arab world. Analysts say that this can be traced to Kuwait's recent history—the Iraqi invasion in 1990 and the seven-month occupation, followed by the Gulf War waged by the forces of the International Alliance to liberate the country. Before the war, Kuwait was considered a country run by and for the elite, its citizens made rich by oil and coddled by hundreds of thousands of imported servants. But the trauma of the occupation, during which the country's property was looted and resistance met with summary

executions, put an end to all that.

The outgoing parliament, elected in 1992 following the liberation of Kuwait, had 35 deputies labeled as "opposition," and it played a prominent role in invigorating political life in Kuwait. The '92 parliament, whose slogan was "protecting public money", uncovered several corruption scandals and shady deals, and succeeded in forming an auditing department attached to the Ministry of Defence. Thus, the outgoing parliament defined a role for itself—questioning ministers, setting a check on major policies, investigating corruption—while avoiding destructive quarrels with the government headed by the crown prince and heir apparent, Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah.

However, before the polling, the Kuwaiti parliament was criticised for not addressing major issues such as the five billion dollar budget deficit and the security threat posed by Iraqi president Saddam Hussein. The parliament's reluctance to take on more important social issues, such as youth unemployment and education, has also left many people cold. Many alleged that the legislature spent too much time on issues being pushed by the Islamists such as whether the sexes should be segregated at universities. Another debate concerned whether Islamic law should be "an influence or the influence on legislation."

It remains to be seen whether the new parliament will be able to carry the democratic experiment in Kuwait

further, or whether it will be more susceptible to government pressures, now that the pro-government deputies have increased in number. A lot will depend on the outcome of the battle over the chair of the house speaker which will be decided next week when the parliament convenes.

The two candidates for that chair are former Speaker Ahmed Al-Saudun, who came top, for the fourth time, in his Khaldiya constituency, and former MP and Finance Minister Jassem Al-Khorafi, who came second in his Shuaikh constituency. It is expected that the government will put its weight behind Khorafi, as Saudun's performance in the outgoing parliament was far from satisfactory to the government. Championing many of the battles of the war on corruption, including the thorny question of the performance of the ruling family in Kuwait and the Ministry of War during the Iraqi invasion, Saudun has earned the enmity of many influential people within the Kuwaiti establishment, who will certainly push for the election of Khorafi. Thus, the battle over the speaker's chair will be the first indicator of the composition of the new parliament, at least as far as the opposition/pro-government polarisation is concerned.

Most of the parliament's new faces have vowed to push for more vital issues. On top of the list are "Kuwaiti POWs currently held in Iraq, internal security, unemployment, citizenship-related issues, and the housing problem," said Al-Nibari.

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Taliban's unlikely story

Washington declares Islamic fundamentalism a danger to the world. Why then has the US welcomed the Taliban's victory in Afghanistan, asks **Eqbal Ahmad**

One is tempted to paraphrase Winston Churchill: the rise and triumph of the Taliban are a mystery wrapped in enigma. Three aspects to their unusual story are noteworthy. One, in the two years since they emerged as yet another group of "Islamic" warlords in Afghanistan, their victories have been unexpected and remarkably easy. Two, in power they impose a regime of brutality that has few parallels in history, including Muslim history. Three, the United States government welcomed the Taliban despite the fact that Washington casts itself as the global defender of human rights and declares Islamic fundamentalism a threat to world peace. What "great games" underlie these ironies?

The Taliban emerged in the autumn of 1994. The warlords who then controlled Kandahar, Afghanistan's southern province, blocked Pakistan's attempt to open a trade route to Central Asia. The Taliban challenged them. The blockade was lifted and the young mullahs who were educated in Pakistan's religious schools won control of Kandahar. During a visit there in 1995, I reconstructed from interviews a picture of the Taliban's victory: while they put on demonstrations of fire-power, contacts were made with commanders on the other side, bribes were offered and defections arranged. The rival warlords abandoned their positions when they sensed isolation and perceived that Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) was backing the Taliban, and when battles promised to be costly and defections demoralised the warlords' remaining forces. The ISI had orchestrated for a decade the American and Saudi-financed jihad against the Soviet Union; as such it retains a certain hold on Afghan political imagination.



To date, the Taliban have not fought a sustained battle, preferring to discriminate artillery and rocket attacks to encounters with the adversary. This pattern held right until 20 September, when Jalalabad near Pakistan's frontier surrendered without a fight. This was a most strategic loss as it cut off Kabul's primary supply routes. A week later the Taliban entered Afghanistan's battered capital after the forces of former Defence Minister Ahmed Shah Massoud abandoned it.

The logic behind the unusual pattern of warfare is worth noting. The *Mujahideen*'s war against the Soviet Union was fuelled by a mix of elements. Generous American and Saudi contributions provided the *Mujahideen* parties with financial incentives; these multiplied vastly as a multi-billion dollar trade also grew in guns and drugs. Afghan nationalism and the rhetoric of jihad against global communism provided a framework of popular support for the war against Soviet occupation. Pakistan's military intelligence, the ISI, played a central role in balancing fictional ambitions and maintaining a semblance of peace among rival *Mujahideen* leaders. International, especially American and Pakistani, backing of the *Mujahideen* held up their morale.

Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan changed the relationship of forces on which the morale and motivation of the *Mujahideen* groups had rested. It ended the mobilising role of nationalism and the idea of jihad. People were tired of warfare and not inclined to take sides among warlords. The superpower withdrew its lucrative, reassuring patronage. With the termination of the West's covert operation, Pakistan's interest in keeping peace among Afghans diminished. What remained were the political ambitions and greed of leaders and commanders, trade in drugs, accustomed battles for turf, and a culture of dependency whereby real or imagined preferences of America, Pakistan, Russia, Iran and India influenced the calculations of commanders and politicians. Warlords pursued their interests in isolation from the people. Alliances, shaped largely by mer-

cenary considerations, shifted with dizzying frequency. Deposed Prime Minister Gulbuddin Hekmatyar became ally and adversary alternately of the Taliban, Uzbek warlord Abdul Rashid Dostum and Tajik commander Ahmed Shah Massoud; so did all the others. Since the affiliations of leaders and followers were shaped by material calculations, there was a premium on deals and defections.

Taliban leaders are ignorant and rigid men. They have no aptitude for negotiations and compromises. It is obvious that they are being helped by professionals. But who? Afghanistan's ousted government has been accusing Pakistan. In September 1995 when Herat, an ancient town on Iran's border, fell to the Taliban, an officially sponsored mob burned down Pakistan's embassy in Kabul and mauled the ambassador. Rumours also attribute a role to the US. Under-secretary of State Robin Raphel's visit to Kandahar last April and meetings with Taliban leaders lent credence to those rumours. What induces Washington to overcome its antipathy to the fundamentalist extreme, observers in Islamabad asked. And what compels the Taliban to meet an unveiled foreign woman, a practice they denounce as un-Islamic? Iran accuses Washington publicly and Islamabad privately. Pakistan denies these allegations. As in all covert operations there is a lack of hard evidence.

Evidence abounds of the Taliban's oppressive ideology and style. They snatched former President Najibullah and his brother out of the United Nations' protection, tortured, then murdered them. Their corpses hung in a Kabul street for 48 hours, dollar bills stuffed in their mouths. What the Taliban inflicted on Kandahar, they are now inflicting on Jalalabad and Kabul. Girls of all ages are banned from school. Women are forbidden to work outside their homes, and ordered to cover themselves from head to foot. Kabul's schools have lost 80 per cent of their teachers, all government offices have 50 per cent less female employees and hospitals have but few female nurses. An inch of exposed female body causes her to be beaten in public by gun-toting Taliban. During the three days following Kabul's "liberation", reporters witnessed four instances of female beatings. Taliban's hospitality to Ms Robin Raphel notwithstanding, they remain unreconstructed misogynists. Mullah Turabi, a member of their Supreme Court, stormed into a press meeting in Kabul on 28 September. "Why are you talking to infidels?" he screamed at officer Gul Mousa and slapped him. AP news agency's Islamabad-based woman reporter was there — a lightning rod. "Quickly tell this woman to get out," he ordered.

Men are better off only marginally. All have been ordered to grow beards. Schools are forbidden to teach corrupt — read modern, secular — subjects. Music is banned. So is play. I saw a 12-year-old boy paraded along the bazaar in Kandahar, his head shaved, looking pained and bewildered. He had been caught in an alley — playing ball.

Last week, a foreign journalist's music cassettes were confiscated from his car in Kabul. Apparently, the Taliban find boys playing ball to be sexually provocative and music a carnal stimulation. I wish the American media would stop its "according to strict Islamic rules" qualifiers. The Taliban's strictures are products of pathology; they have nothing to do with Islam or Muslims. Thousands of Kabul's inhabitants are fleeing their homes. They are trapped in hell, as Pakistan, refuge to some three million Afghans, has now closed its border.

The equanimity of official US reaction to Taliban's capture of Kabul contradicts Washington's stance on human rights and extremism. The day Kabul fell, AP quoted a US official as saying that the Taliban "are unlikely to become the sort of Islamic fundamentalists like Iran because they follow a different brand of Islam." Reminded that Afghanistan's neighbours were concerned that the Taliban's victory may encourage fundamentalists elsewhere, the official said, "We are not persuaded that the concern is legitimate." The next day an unidentified State Department official told reporters that diplomatic re-



A lone Taliban fighter takes a break in the hills north of the Afghan capital Kabul. The Taliban, after storming Kabul a couple of weeks ago, has now suffered serious military setbacks (photo: AFP)

lations with Afghanistan, in abeyance since 1979, would be re-established when the security situation improves. The State Department announced that a special envoy would soon visit Kabul.

The Taliban are Sunni fanatics; as such they hated of Shi'ites and neighbouring Iran is theologically rooted, an opportunity the US government finds too tempting to miss. But this may not be the only incentive to forego liberal commitments. Two American energy corporations — UNOCAL and Delta Oil — have been wanting to build gas pipelines from Turkmenistan to the Gulf coast of Pakistan. One 890-mile pipeline from the Daulatabad field to Pakistan is projected to cost \$2 billion; another extending 1,000 miles from Chardzhou to the Indian Ocean may cost \$2.5 billion. The pipeline must traverse Afghanistan. Both companies were said to be betting on the Taliban who regard it a religious duty to support commercial interests. On 1 October, Chris Taggart, executive vice-president of UNOCAL, told Reuters news agency, "We regard it [the Taliban victory] as very positive." He urged the US to extend recognition to the new rulers in Kabul and thus "lead the way to international lending agencies coming in."

Senator Hank Brown, one of a handful of legislators actively involved in that region, held that "the good part of what has happened is that one of the factions at last seems to be capable of developing a government in Afghanistan."

Senator Brown spoke too soon. The week after entering Kabul the Taliban ran into trouble. Their advance to the north where Ahmed Shah Massoud's forces have retreated was stalled. They were ambushed and took heavy casualties. As minister of defence, Massoud was the mainstay of the government in Kabul. A talented tactician and able soldier, he was the most effective guerrilla commander against the Soviet forces in Afghanistan. But his government lacked viability because it was dominated by an ethnic minority: Tajiks like Massoud. It did not have a credible representation of Pashtuns, the ma-

jority group which has long ruled Afghanistan. To offset this weakness, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, the Pashtun extremist of the Hizb Islami and long-time foe of Massoud, was brought in as prime minister last year. The move severely divided Massoud's supporters. It also alienated the moderate Pashtuns who had supported the government. Hekmatyar proved more a burden than asset. His whereabouts is not known.

A mere 100 Taliban captured Jalalabad, the strategic town near Pakistan's border on 20 September. In winter Kabul cannot be supplied except from Jalalabad, Herat and Kandahar, now all under Taliban control. Massoud's best option was to retreat to his stronghold in the north, regroup, re-align and counter-attack. He made an orderly retreat, taking all his armour. In the last week, his forces have been mauling Taliban units around the Salang Pass which divides eastern Afghanistan from the north. He has also formed a coalition with Abdul Rashid Dostum, the powerful Uzbek warlord who was once a nationalist, then a communist, and always an intrepid opportunist. Abdul Karim Khalili, leader of the Shia of Hazarajat province, has also joined the new coalition. Thus the three largest ethnic minorities — Tajik, Uzbek and Hazara, who make up a third of Afghans — have coalesced against the Taliban, who are Pashtuns with shallow roots and a dubious reputation among their own people. The stage is set for more warfare, or the partition of Afghanistan along ethnic lines.

Britain is long gone. The Cold War is over. But the "great game" still casts its shadow on Afghanistan. Russia's consul-general was present when the three anti-Taliban groups formally announced their alliance. The coalition is also supported by the former Soviet republics of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan and, of course, Iran may be expected to lend a helping hand. Afghanistan is the calf in this *buzkashi*, the game of horsemen snatching at a hapless carcass. It is a loser's game. There is much blood-letting and no one gets the beef.

Battle against Ghali

CONTINUING the United States' virulent campaign against United Nations Secretary-General Boutros Ghali, State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns declared on Tuesday that if Africa does not come up with a "good, credible, impressive candidate, the US will look elsewhere to replace Ghali." American opposition to the secretary-general having a second term has intensified in the run-up to the American presidential elections, scheduled for 5 November.

US Secretary of State Warren Christopher asserted that he found "individuals who could be good candidates for the post" during his recent Africa tour. President Bill Clinton has used his opposition to Ghali to take the wind out of Bob Dole's campaign. The Republicans object to American funding of the UN and the sending of US troops on peacekeeping missions abroad. Asked if the US might agree to extend Ghali's term for a short period after the end of the year until the issue of a successor was resolved, Burns replied that this was not under consideration. He added that America would rather not use the Security Council veto and appealed to Ghali to withdraw his candidacy.

Spectre of war in Kabul

THE ISLAMIST Taliban militia which seized Kabul less than three weeks ago has brought massive military reinforcements to the Afghan capital in preparation for a likely attack by the ousted government's forces. "Around 5,000 *Mujahideen* arrived in Kabul yesterday [Tuesday] and more are going to come if need be," acting Information and Culture Minister Amir Khan Mustaqi told journalists. The comments came after the former government's military commander, Ahmed Shah Massoud, allegedly warned the Taliban to evacuate the city to prevent bloodshed and destruction in a renewed battle for the capital.

Reports that the former government's army had recaptured Kabul's major air base, Bagram, were, however, firmly denied by the Taliban. Mustaqi affirmed that the "military situation was firmly under control" and that there was "no danger of losing the base." Meanwhile, fighting between the two factions broke out on a north-bound highway at a distance of 10km from the capital. According to eye-witness accounts, about 200 heavily armed Taliban, backed up by tanks and rocket launchers, pushed the pro-government forces to about 50km north of the city. In view of the tense situation, Iran has reportedly pulled out most of its embassy personnel from the Afghan capital, leaving only a skeleton staff. Iran was one of the few countries to keep its Kabul mission open during the conflict.

Arms build up in East Asia

THE INTERNATIONAL Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) said in its annual report that the renewed United States military commitment to the Asia-Pacific region was one of the key defence developments in the world this year.

With the breakup of the former Soviet Union in 1991, the US became the top international arms supplier and today commands over half the world's market with annual sales of \$15 billion, the international survey said last week.

The *Military Balance 1996-97* listed the runner-up exporters for 1995 as Britain (\$4.8 billion), France (\$3.8 billion), Russia (\$3 billion), Germany (\$1.4 billion) and China (\$600 million).

The six nations regularly supply between 80 and 90 per cent of the international arms trade. Saudi Arabia is the top spender and has been for a decade.

Not enough food

SEVERAL African countries are suffering from chronic food shortages and emergencies, despite improved food supplies and harvests in much of sub-Saharan Africa, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) said in a recent report.

The quarterly *Special Report on the Food Supply Situation and Crop Prospects in Sub-Saharan Africa* said Burundi, Liberia and Somalia are the worst affected. It cited civil strife, displacement of rural populations and economic sanctions as the main causes threatening food supplies in Burundi. Food prices there have risen sharply since late July and the situation is likely to deteriorate in the coming months because cereals cannot be imported.

The Rome-based FAO said 14 sub-Saharan countries — Liberia, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Burundi, Sudan, Tanzania, Angola, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Rwanda and Zaire — are short of food.

The report recommended speedy delivery of relief food to Liberia and parts of Somalia and Sudan and appealed for funds to rehabilitate agriculture in Rwanda and Sierra Leone. Refugees in Tanzania and eastern Zaire, mostly from Rwanda, need continued emergency food, the report said.

In countries south of the Sahara, 40 per cent of the population, or about 215 million people, do not have enough food. Of the 82 countries the FAO lists as being poor and faced with food problems, 41 are in this region.

Past wars, current victims

REPRESENTATIVES from 50 countries called for a ban last week on anti-personnel mines — the scourge responsible for thousands of deaths and maimings each year — after wrapping up a conference in the Canadian capital Ottawa. Canada called for better cooperation among countries to eliminate anti-personnel mines, as an international aid official predicted the devices could claim 200,000 more victims in the next decade.

Countries making up the Ottawa Group called for "a commitment to work together to ensure... the earliest possible conclusion of a legally binding international agreement to ban anti-personnel mines." The representatives also called for a follow-up conference to be held in Belgium in June next year.

According to the Red Cross, only 23 nations publicly supported the idea of a global ban a year ago. The US representative at the conference said that while Washington has a "deep commitment" to an eventual global ban on land mines, "we are not prepared at this point to set a date for that imposition."

America is divided over the possible ban; some military officials there say land mines are essential for the protection of US troops. The treaty would cover the production, use, stockpiling and export of mines.

A similar conference of 57 nations sponsored by the UN in Geneva in May could only reach an accord on limiting the use of mines. There are an estimated 110 million land mines strewn around 70 nations. Anti-personnel mines kill or wound roughly 500 people each week around the globe.

Christopher courts Africa

Never mind America's resolve to remove Boutros Ghali, watch out for Washington's Africa overtures, warns **Gamal Nkrumah**

If United States Secretary of State Warren Christopher is as clever as King Solomon, then Africa is not as credulous as the Queen of Sheba. Christopher just ended a trip to five African countries — Mali, Ethiopia, Tanzania, South Africa and Angola. He began unpromisingly, by touching a raw nerve and announcing that he was in Africa partly to drum up support for America's crusade against Nigeria's ruling military junta. Most African states would rather not interfere in the internal affairs of oil-rich Nigeria — Africa's most populous state with a sixth of the continent's population. Most of Christopher's African hosts were sceptical about the efficacy of international sanctions against Nigeria's military rulers.

So does it look like America's plans to rid Africa of military dictatorships might be running aground? Not quite. In the poverty-stricken West African nation of Mali, Christopher announced that the US was to grant Mali \$700,000 to assist the Sahelian country in organising democratic elections next year. A further \$1 million were donated by America to help Mali disarm the secessionist Tuareg tribesmen in the Sahara who have waged against the Malian central government for the past two decades. The Islamist Tuareg leadership was backed by Libya's leader Muammar Gaddafi.

You have to hand it to South Africa's President Nelson Mandela. He rarely puts a foot wrong in the international political arena — especially when the subject is Africa. When Christopher came up with the idea of creating an African "peacekeeping and conflict prevention" force, Mandela was lukewarm and warned that South Africa would not be party to such an "intervention" force unless it was under the auspices of the United Nations. Next, Christopher tried to lobby Mandela's support for finding a more pliable candidate to replace UN Secretary-General Boutros Ghali. Mandela's curt reply was that South Africa fully backs Ghali in his bid for a second

term in office.

As we near the 5 November American presidential elections, the World Food Summit, scheduled to take place in a couple of weeks in Rome, pales into insignificance. But to many Africans, American presidential election soundbites are about as palatable as empty plates — a staggering 40 per cent of the continent's billion people are starving or malnourished. America is all might in the food aid business, but it is the UN that is perceived to have done most to eradicate long-term world hunger. Regardless of its many shortcomings, the UN Commission on Sustainable Development is a case in point. The work of the Food and Agriculture Organisation, a UN affiliate, is another. It is partly because the UN is widely perceived throughout Africa to be more sympathetic to the continent's causes and development concerns that there is a reluctance to obey blindly American dictates.

To many Africans Christopher sounded something like this: "Here is our plan. Africa is not permitted to question Uncle Sam." Yes, African leaders should give the American proposal serious thought. But Africans must resolve their problems themselves.

Christopher delivered an authoritative performance when he announced plans to create an American-controlled

African crisis reaction force. "Strictly a humanitarian mission," Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs George Moose stressed. He added that the US would foot the bill of personnel training for the preventive force, estimated at between \$25 million and \$40 million. But the twist is that Africa's most important country, South Africa, flatly turned it down.

As Christopher, I'm sure, knows all

too well, the capacity to perform on American television is a key ingredient in the making of a distinguished secretary of state. Christopher is known to shy away from television cameras, but he is schooled in many nuances of the medium. Yes, television captures moments and reinforces impressions of people and places. But that only applies to countries where there is one television set for every three citizens like in America. In Africa there is an average of one television set for every 50,000 people. The point is that Christopher's trip was not for domestic consumption in Africa; it was essentially for the sake of local concerns in the US. The media coverage of the secretary of state's trip and the magic of Christopher posing next to Mandela is bound to win some votes for President Bill Clinton and the Democrats from African Americans. All of which makes Christopher's African tour a little triumph for American foreign policy.

Christopher's remarkable self-assurance and self-righteousness begs the question: is there an unequivocal version of world politics presided over by an omnipotent and omniscient American overseer? That Africa has a place in world politics was made abundantly clear in Addis Ababa, Cape Town and the other places Christopher visited. But does Africa have a

say in world politics? Africans are trying to put their house in order to have just that. Mandela and many other African leaders do not want Ghali out. The Americans, in turn, have not backed down even though several African nations have objected to being forced to choose a new secretary-general. Even the Organisation of African Unity's secretary-general, Salim Ahmed Salim, the symbolic head of the continent, has been suggested by the Americans as a possible alternative to Ghali.

There is no mistaking it in Africa, Christopher came across as vainglorious but virtually admirable for his sheer bravado. He took precious time to visit Africa during the run-up to Clinton's re-election bid. "The secretary will stress that Africa matters to the US," said Moose on the eve of Christopher's departure. This was Christopher's very first official trip to sub-Saharan Africa. Why now? Who could say that Christopher's African tour was not stage-managed and timed to boost Clinton's re-election campaign?

Christopher's tour came at a critical time for the continent. The progress of Africa's democratisation and political liberalisation process is of some importance to America. African economic development, too, is important. It is testing times for the troubled continent. But the African leaders Christopher met, as Mandela so characteristically demonstrated, were in no mood to kowtow to Washington.

The message they delivered to Christopher was that, despite the continent's poverty and political problems, they are not sheep. Mandela and Mali's President Alpha Konare, for instance, fought like lions to institutionalise democracy in their respective countries. Others like UNITA's Jonas Savimbi, Inkatha's Mangosuthu Buthelezi and Zaire's President Mobutu Sese Seku are sheep that follow the US line. Perhaps this is why Christopher did not include them in his itinerary — for if sheep can yet learn to roar, then I'm the Queen of Sheba.



Al-Ahram Weekly

Ezer, or

Every once in a while, a leader comes along, so misguided, so self-engrossed and so out-of-synch with the political nuances of the times that he becomes the object of ridicule by his countrymen and the citizens of the world. But when the fate of a region is at stake, the matter no longer seems amusing. At times like these, others step into their place and try to do the job the way it must be done. Enter Ezer Weizman.

It would be redundant to say that since Netanyahu came to power in May, the peace process has been stalled. That much is evident given the current state of the negotiations, the fact that Israeli troops still roam the streets of Hebron, that his concept of compliance revolves around re-negotiating. But to make the point clear, it should be noted that other Israeli politicians and statesmen, like Peres and Weizman, have accepted the fact that the current course of peace is completely off track and Netanyahu's actions since May in no way indicate that he has the ability to lead his country anywhere but down the road to chaos.

"We can never have peace for nothing," said Shimon Peres recently. "Only peace can bring security. It's absurd to demand one without offering the other," he added.

And Weizman, who assured President Mubarak that the previous agreements will be honoured and implemented, also noted that Netanyahu is an amateur in politics who is sowing the seeds of a conflagration in the region and inside Israel, itself.

In his own defence, the only retort the Israeli prime minister was able to muster was that President Weizman's post is purely ceremonial and he has no mandate to negotiate peace. Perhaps so. But at this stage of the game, now is not the time to throw a temper tantrum and cry, "Mine, mine". Leadership demands more than these childish outbursts, as do the Arabs, peace and the region.

Although Netanyahu has survived the vote of no-confidence, it is abundantly clear that save for Israeli extremists, radicals and zealots, no one else has any confidence in his abilities — on any level.

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Main office

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Telephone: 5786100/5786200/5786300/5786400/5786500
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Overseas offices

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Washington DC: Ataf El-Ghannai, Al-Ahram Office, Suite 1258, 529 National Press Bldg, Washington DC 20045; Tel: (202) 737-2121/2122.
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United Kingdom

London: Amr Abdel-Samir, Al-Ahram Office, 203 - 209 North Gower Street London NW1 2NJ
Tel: 0171 388 1155, Fax: 0171 388 3130

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Paris: Sherif El-Shoubasy, Bureau Al-Ahram 26, Rue Marbeuf, 75008 Paris; Tel: (1) 537 72700; Al-Ahram F; Fax: (1) 428-93963.

Germany

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Boycott and the left

This is the second of two articles by Mohamed Sid-Ahmed on the issue of boycotting Israel, the first of which was published in Al-Ahram Weekly on 26 September 1996

By rights, peace in the Middle East should have been championed by the left. After all, it was the left which had developed the Peace Movement, within the framework of the World Peace Council sponsored by the Soviet Union to counterbalance the nuclear monopoly America enjoyed after World War II, before the Soviet Union developed its own nuclear arsenal. But things turned out very differently.

The first direct negotiations between Arab and Israeli leaders were held between Anwar Sadat, whose policies had become increasingly anti-Soviet, and Menachem Begin, the unchallenged leader of the Israeli right. The strongest opposition to the Camp David agreements and to normalisation with Israel came from Arab, including Egyptian, left-wing intellectuals. This raises the question of whether their hostility was based on objective reasons, or whether it stemmed from subjective factors due to features that are specific to the political tapestry of the Middle East.

To answer the question, it is necessary to trace the historical course of the Egyptian communist movement, the nucleus of the Egyptian left. After the Egyptian Communist Party was dissolved by the Wafd in 1924, communist organisations were reintroduced into the Egyptian political scene in the early forties by Jewish intellectuals of the upper middle class (such as banker's son Henri Curjel). It will be remembered that in 1942, Rommel stood practically at the gates of

Alexandria, and, if the battle of Alamein had gone his way, there would have been nothing to stop him marching triumphantly into Palestine. The relative ease with which the Egyptian communist organisation spread was due to an international factor, namely, the Soviet Union's landmark victory at Stalingrad, which made it very difficult for its close ally at the time, Great Britain, to oppose a communist movement in Egypt as vigorously as it had in the past.

Because of the absence of a communist/internationalist component in Egyptian politics throughout the late twenties and the thirties, when the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty was signed in 1936 at the behest of Great Britain, which hoped to neutralise the leading nationalist party, the Wafd, at a time Mussolini occupied Abyssinia and controlled the sources of the Nile, the more radical trends in the Egyptian national movement turned pro-German. To justify their tilt, they invoked the argument that "the enemy of my enemy is my friend", little realising that the new 'friend' could turn out to be an even more ferocious enemy. Understandably worried about the increasingly pro-Nazi sentiments of the Egyptian nationalist intelligentsia, Jewish intellectuals could well have seen their salvation as lying in the propagation of an anti-racist ideology that could counterbalance the appeal of Nazism in the eyes of Egyptian nationalists. Communism, which is by definition anti-racist, fit the bill perfectly.

After the war and the defeat of Nazism, the Egyptian anti-colonial movement, with the communist movement as one of its component elements, occupied centre stage. But with the creation of Israel in 1948, Jewish intellectuals at the head of the Egyptian communist organisations were faced with a dilemma. If they had espoused communism to protect their Jewish identity against Nazism, where did they stand with respect to the Zionist state, which put itself forward as the supreme custodian of Jewish identity but which was at the same time rejected by all nationalist forces in Egypt as a usurper of Arab land and an enemy of the Egyptian national movement? As communist militants, Jewish and non-Jewish, were arrested on the grounds that they belonged to organisations suspected by the state of having Zionist sympathies, the Egyptian communist movement exploded from within and a new generation of native Egyptian communist leaders rose to advocate ridding the movement of Jews in leading positions.

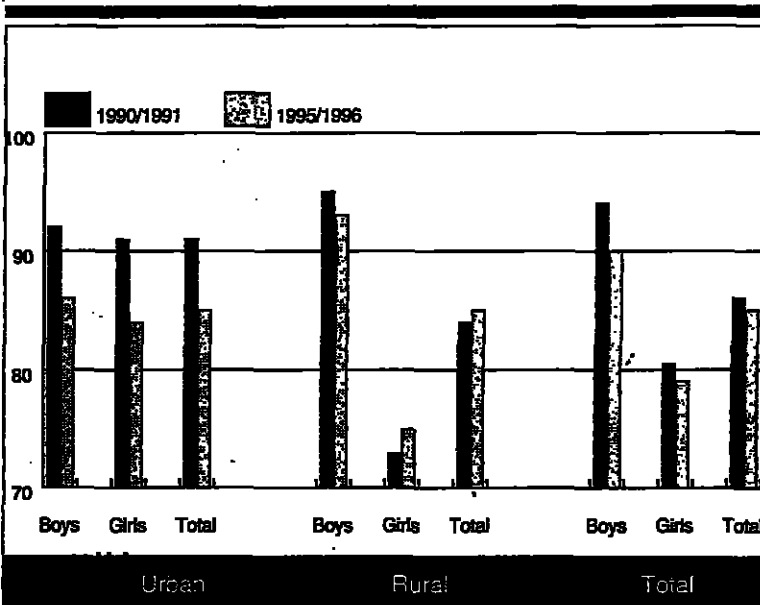
This crisis, not specific only to Egypt, but apparently to all communist parties as well, helped develop an Arab communist movement for whom pan-Arabism was perceived as part and parcel of the Arab national liberation ideology. When Nasser took over in 1952, both his mistrust of communism and his trial-and-error approach stood in the way of a rapprochement with the communist intellectuals, even after the "Egyptianisation" of their leadership. But

gradually, and despite the ordeals they suffered in Nasser's prisons, the communists reached a reconciliation with the regime, not while they were still in prison, but after their release and concomitantly with Khrushchev's visit to Egypt to celebrate the completion of the first phase of the construction of the Aswan High Dam. Shortly after their release, the communists disbanded their independent organisations and joined Nasser's own secret *Tali'a* ("Vanguard") organisation, at the heart of the official Arab Socialist Union.

It can thus be argued that if communism served Jewish intellectuals in Egypt during World War II as an umbrella which protected their identity in the face of the Nazi threat, a pan-Arab version of communist ideology served Egyptian left-wing intellectuals as a bulwark against the growing Zionist threat after the creation of the state of Israel in 1948. But just as the creation of Israel introduced the dimension of pan-Arab nationalism to Arab communism, so too it introduced the dimension of Zionism to Israeli communism. The Israeli Communist Party split, and a majority of its Jewish militants formed a separate party with clear Zionist inclinations. The Arab and Israeli communists moved away from each other and their common abandonment of internationalism stood as an impediment in the face of the role the left could have played to promote peace in the Middle East.

A long way to go

Abdel-Azim Anis assesses new evidence relating to the take up rates of primary education in both urban and rural areas



being no higher than 86 per cent. The report goes on to give enrolment ratios according to gender and according to location — rural or urban — in two different school years, 1990-91 and 1995-96.

Any reform of primary education in Egypt should have two objectives — the completion of primary education for all children, a critical factor in the realisation of which is to minimise dropout rates and close the gender gap in initial access, and the attainment of an adequate level of quality, in terms of both cognitive achievement and social attitudes.

To achieve these goals a precise estimate of the change in the enrolment ratio over time, and according to gender and location, is necessary. We must, too, be in a position to

monitor the quality of primary education and its determinants. Any planning process must therefore be furnished with such an information base, and the present report is one of a series of activities devoted to satisfying the information requirements of such a planning process.

Now what are the main results of this report submitted to UNICEF? The report gives two characterisations of primary education in Egypt. The first concerns "paper" pupils.

It is often claimed that a proportion of pupils enrolled in primary education — exist — only "on paper". For various reasons the names of pupils are retained on school records when they have actually dropped out. The extent of this phenomenon is not known with

any precision, though one means of estimating the number of dropouts whose names remain in school records — the method, used in this report — is to compare the number enrolled with the number who actually sit for exams. The result of such a comparison reveals that the ratio is higher for boys than for girls, though it never exceeds three per cent.

The second characterisation is the age structure of enrolled pupils. This is normally obtained from the Ministry of Education's school records, in which it is not possible to place excessive confidence. The age structure of enrolment can, however, be assessed through a field survey.

Finally, the report shows an increase in enrolment between 1990/1991 and 1995/1996, though the rate is higher for girls than for boys. In urban areas the rate of increase has fallen dramatically. In Al-Azhar schools, specially for girls, while in general enrolment ratios have decreased for boys and girls in urban areas. Also the number of children outside primary education during this period (1990-1995) increased from one million in 1990 to 1.3 million in 1995 for those aged between six and ten and from 1.1 million in 1990 to 1.6 million for the age group six to 11. Dropout rates are higher in rural areas than in urban areas.

While exclusion from primary education is most serious in Upper Egypt, from Beni Suef to Sohag, this does not mean that the problem does not exist in Lower Egypt. And in spite of some improvement in the last five years, the problem of low enrolment ratios for girls in rural areas is still one of the most serious dilemmas affecting primary education in Egypt.

The writer is a professor of mathematics at Ain Shams University and a former adviser to the Minister of Education.

Eye on the future

By Naguib Mahfouz

Unfortunately my health did not permit me to attend the opening of Al-Ahram's new printing press in the Sixth of October City, though I should very much have liked to be present at a ceremony that marks not just an expansion of Al-Ahram but a watershed in Egypt's entry into the information age.

Certainly, as media competition increases, only the most efficient publishers will succeed, which means that we must all embrace the new technologies that are revolutionising the media.

Newspapers, these days, are not merely involved in competing with other newspapers. They exist in the same market as other sources of information, including those television satellite channels that provide only news coverage, and of course, the internet. Yet I cannot help but feel that there will always be a need for newspapers, a desire for the printed word, for something that can be handled and read, and folded and stored, if desired, at the back of a drawer.

The electronic media will never replace the document, just as cinema could never replace theatre. Of course we are surrounded by those who confidently predict the demise of the newspaper, but such doomsday scare-mongers are always with us and always will be. But if the press is to succeed properly in the new age of free access to information it must capitalise on what it can do best. It must present digests of news and events, written with complete freedom. And it must utilise the latest advances in modern printing techniques.

Based on an interview by Mohamed Salmawy.

The Press This Week

October: "Tomorrow Egypt celebrates President Mubarak's 16th year in power. From the very first day, he drew a map for the future of Egypt among the nations of the region and the world... Not only was Mubarak a fighter in wars of liberation but also in the battle of development... He worked for achieving Arab solidarity and for the first time there was a unified Arab stance on the regional peace issue... and very recently the IMF approved the new economic reform programme that will lighten Egypt's debts and attract foreign investment — meaning more achievements for the benefit of the ordinary citizen." (Editorial, 13 October)

Al-Ahali: "The glorious spirit of October has returned in the wake of the 'Badr 96' manoeuvres which demonstrated that Egypt still has a sword and shield. The victory celebrations were accompanied by a public awareness, strengthened by showing the 'Nasser 56' film and President Mubarak's refusal to go to Washington. The average citizen's understanding that Egypt's national security means total Arab security was enhanced, underlining that peace must be protected by force." (Lufti Waked, 9 October)

Al-Akhar: "President Mubarak never lost sight of the Palestinian issue. He has always supported the Palestinian cause and sought the implementation of the accords reached. He has stood against those who wish to avoid the peace commitments and warned those who wish to turn the clock back that they would be the principal losers." (Editorial, 13 October)

Al-Gomhuriya: "It is wonderful that Egypt should decline \$391 million from the IMF because it has enough. What is more wonderful is that Mubarak should start his 16th year in power with the following figures: growth will reach 5 per cent annually; inflation will decrease to 6 per cent; investment and savings will reach 2.5 per cent of GDP as well as creating 400,000 jobs for youth during the coming year; a great achievement which could not have come true if it were not for him." (Samir Ragab, 14 October)

Al-Shaab: "President Mubarak declared that he was fulfilling the wishes of the people by not attending the Washington summit. Now the people of Egypt do not want Netanyahu invited to Egypt to attend the economic

conference until he offers an apology to the president and changes his stance towards the commitments of the previous Israeli government." (Dr Helmi Morad, 8 October)

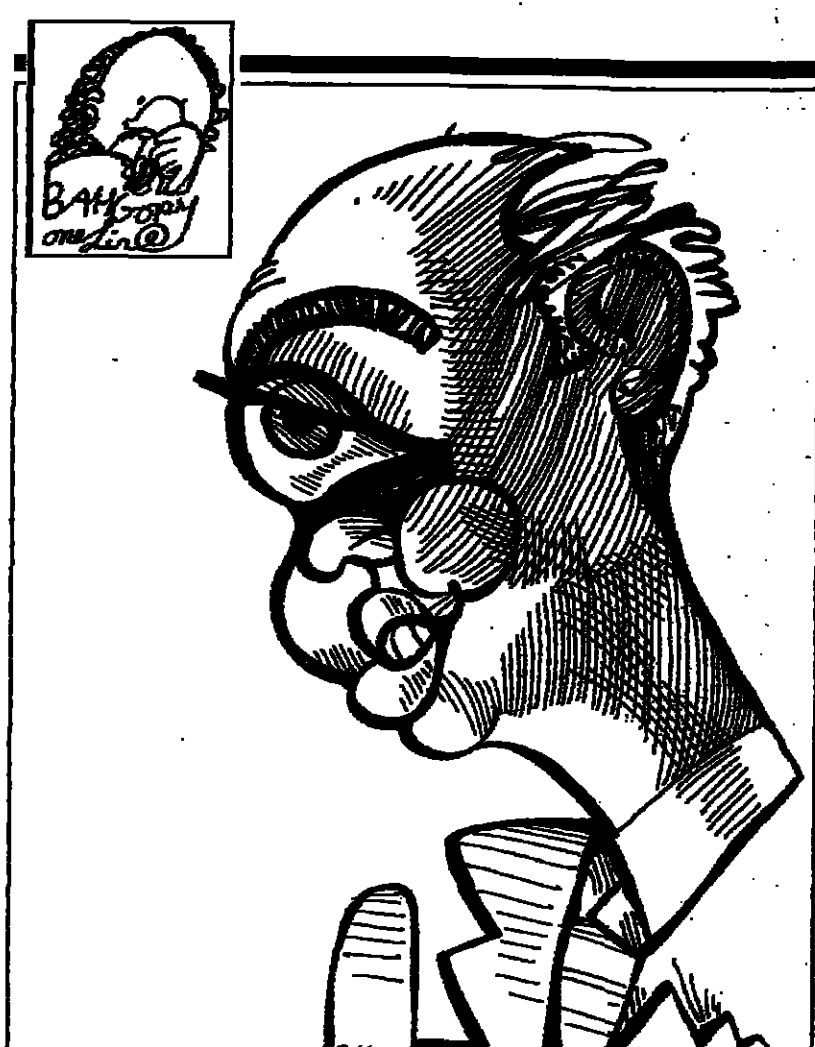
Al-Ahram: "From the first day, President Mubarak has always set Egypt's interests above all other considerations. This principle continues to guide Egypt's internal, Arab and international policies. He has chosen to implement economic reform measures without which the Egyptian economy would have collapsed; to return Egypt to its rightful place in the Arab world; to the path of comprehensive and just peace for the region which has suffered many wars; to the democratic path which allows freedom of expression... Under Mubarak Egypt has become a force to be reckoned with on the international scene." (Editorial, 14 October)

Al-Wafd: "If it is impossible to prevent Israel from attending the economic conference in Egypt then it should receive the treatment it deserves — boycott by the Arab delegations, no agreements, no investment, and no business, so that it will realise its folly in transgressing against the Arabs and threatening their holy places and using unpalatable terms in describing them!" (Gamal Badawi, 14 October)

Al-Mussawwar: "I cannot find a plausible reason why we have not given much attention to what is happening in Afghanistan although we are bound to be affected... Taliban espouses all that is extreme inside and outside... and we may have to face the danger of it becoming a haven for terrorism and terrorists. We must abandon our complacency and prepare to confront the danger that threatens us and curb it." (Abdel-Qader Shuhayeb, 11 October)

Al-Arabi: "After capturing Kabul, the Islamic Taliban movement has begun its 'democratic' practices by killing those opposed to it. This backward fascist regime is bound to find support from the US which sees it as a thorn in Asia's, and Iran's, side and a possible site for refuelling the so-called Islamic movements to be used as before — whenever needed — for training terrorists to cause troubles in other countries." (Gamal Selim, 14 October)

Compiled by Hala Saqr



What better occasion to portray Ibrahim Nafie, the chairman of the board of Al-Ahram organisation, than the week in which Al-Ahram's 50th anniversary is celebrated? The press represents Al-Ahram's commitment to the future, a future that Ibrahim Nafie has clearly the silver sideburns and thoughtful lines of the face, adds up to a future vision.

مكتبة من الأصل

17-23 October 1996

Al-Ahram

Opinion 9

Close up

Salama A. Salama

Growth and renewal

I have spent 28 years of my life in Al-Ahram, which perhaps affords a suitable vantage point from which to survey the events, the faces and the changes that have affected the organisation over the past three decades. Certainly, when one looks back over such a long time, the result is a mixture of feelings, pride in things accomplished, frustration at things left undone and hopes unrealised. There have been moments of elation, and moments, too, of despair. Such is the inevitable accumulation of the experience of three decades.

The past, of course, remains the past. And maybe it is more useful to concentrate on the future, to try and predict what will happen to Al-Ahram as it enters a new millennium. Is the organisation in a position to deal with the vast growth of new technologies, the unprecedented information revolution that shapes, and will increasingly shape, our lives? Or is it too weighed down with the traditions and precedents that have accumulated during its 120 year history? Will the coming generations prove capable of carrying the torch, of continuing the job of building, which must continue at an ever faster pace if we are to keep up with changing events?

Certainly those who joined the organisation when I did would have been unlikely to predict that some three decades later they would be attending the opening of yet another new Al-Ahram project, the state of the art printing press that has been constructed in 6th of October City. Who would then have thought that hoary old Al-Ahram, venerable with white hair, repository of so much tradition, would thus be keeping up with the times?

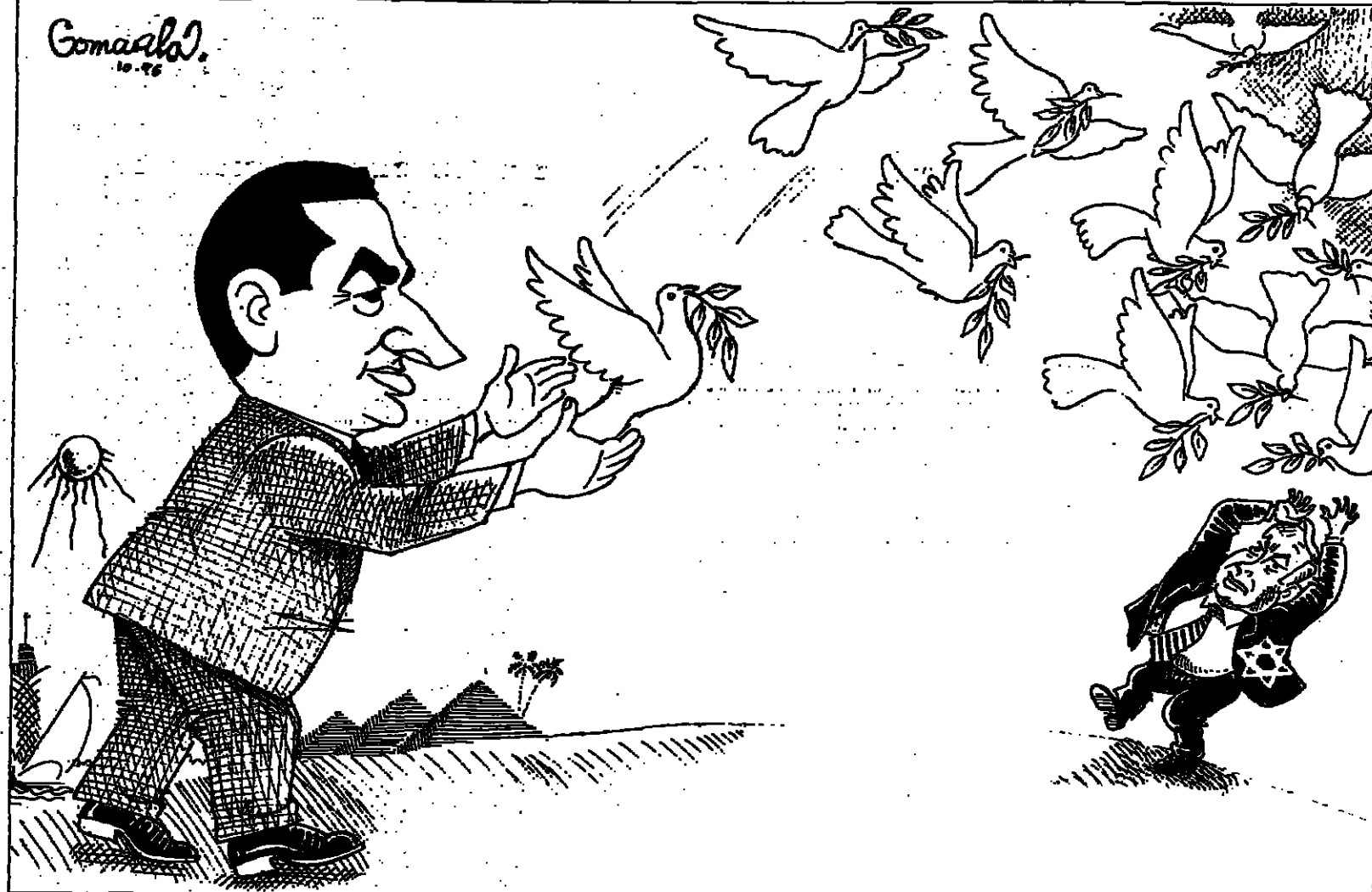
Yet as Al-Ahram advances in age, this does not mean that its vitality approaches. Rather it implies a growing maturity, a growing consolidation, a building on the foundations of past achievements.

Over the past few years Al-Ahram has sought to reach more readers than ever. It now publishes in the most important foreign languages. And as its publications have increased in number, so have the buildings it occupies, buildings that are now home to a whole host of activities and to the necessary support facilities that have allowed the organisation to attain significant international prestige.

For a multitude of reasons Al-Ahram, originally founded by Syrians, assumed traits that are quintessentially Egyptian. It learned to cooperate with the powers that be, to co-exist in a close relationship without being absorbed by the dominant political culture.

In the past 20 years policies have changed and evolved and so has Al-Ahram. And one of the reasons for its continued growth is the existence of a powerful cord, binding management and workers together, from the top of the organisation to the bottom, a chain that links editors and workers, but which has always allowed for a degree of elasticity. Without this bond Al-Ahram would not have survived and flourished, and would not have renewed itself with every passing phase.

Gomaa



Soapbox

No need to tremor

Egypt is liable to be affected by movements along two plate boundaries — to the north the African/Eurasian plate boundary, cause of last week's tremors, and to the north east the African/Arabian plate boundary which runs through the Gulf of Aqaba and extends northward to include the Dead Sea and up to the mountains of Turkey, the cause of the 1995 quake, and which extends, beneath the Red Sea to the Gulf of Suez. Egypt is also crossed by several fault systems, which may also cause tremors, as happened in October 1992.

Earthquake related hazards are many, some more obvious than others. Buildings, bridges, power lines and pipelines are all at risk. When wet soil is shaken liquefaction may occur, greatly reducing soil strength and in some cases causing the ground to behave like quick sand. When this happens, buildings can just topple over or partially sink. Improved underground drainage systems would help to reduce such damage.

The Nile valley is very wet land, though not all wet soils are subject to liquefaction, so detailed studies of the nature of the soil are particularly important. Fire, too, can result from earthquakes, caused by the breaking of powerlines and gas pipes, though such dangers can be combated by installing plenty of valves in pipe systems.

Landslides, such as the one in Mugattam, which followed tremors in 1992, are another serious secondary hazard, one which requires detailed study of rock properties and site stability to identify areas at risk.

While earthquakes cannot be stopped, their negative effects can be limited but first areas at risk must be identified by thorough geological mapping and development in such areas be limited, and secondly, public awareness of the threats and precautions to be taken must be increased.

This week's Soapbox speaker is a professor of Geology and chair of the Shura Council Committee on Human Resources and Local Administration.



Farkhonda Hassan

A chasm of hope

Recent developments in the peace process force us to re-formulate our priorities as we search for new strategies capable of accommodating such developments.

In the most recent Israeli election the prime minister was elected by direct ballot. And it is this departure from the established electoral process, in which the party that won the majority of votes selected the prime minister from among its ranks, and if necessary created a coalition with other parties that would guarantee a majority in the Knesset, which brought Benjamin Netanyahu to power.

The new electoral system offers a key to understanding recent developments in Israeli politics. That Netanyahu, espousing a hard-line platform, won the elections by the very narrow margin of 0.3 per cent indicates that Israeli society is divided, almost equally, over the issue of the peace process. One half of society supports the peace process, more or less as it had been conducted by the former Labour government together with its left-wing coalition partners, while the other half, if not totally opposed to the peace process or opposed to Arab demands, have strong reservations with regard to certain negotiation points regarding land, settlements and other issues.

Never before has Israel been rent by such a sharp and clear cut division splitting society virtually down the middle over such a fateful issue as progress in the peace process. And this rift, following Netanyahu's first three months in office, three months in which he has begun to implement his hard-line policies and attempted to renege on commitments already made by Israel, has established itself as a permanent feature of the Israeli political landscape, a fact underscored by the recent vote of confidence taken in the Knesset which Netanyahu narrowly won by a margin of six votes.

Although the result of the vote came as a disappointment to the peace camp inside Israel, it nonetheless betrays an important fact. A large segment of Israeli public opinion maintains faith in the advantages that peace will bring to Israel. Indeed Israelis, during the last two years of the Labour administration, had already begun to feel the benefits of peace, following Israeli-Palestinian agreements and the beginnings of progress on the Syrian track. There was a tangible rapprochement with several Arab countries and the optimism and sense of potential stability that was everywhere in the air was translated into an unprecedented boom in the Israeli economy.

Arabs cannot remain complacent over the increasing polarisation within Israeli society, writes **Ibrahim Nafie**. Both on the government and non-governmental levels, they must act to bolster the Israeli peace camp



Then Netanyahu's government, a coalition of right-wing and religious parties, assumed power. They began to attempt to renege on commitments made by their predecessors, and repeatedly expressed the wish to review agreements already reached. Progress on the Syrian track came to a full stop while tensions escalated, the result being the recent bloody confrontation between the Israelis and Palestinians.

The image of peace propagated by the Labour government had been replaced by escalating tensions reminiscent of an earlier phase. The Israeli economy, which in terms of investment was beginning to reap the peace dividend, has been the first casualty of these developments. Investors have begun to withdraw their support for projects as the atmosphere has degenerated into one acrimony between the pro- and anti-peace camps within Israeli society.

This situation demands that we reformulate our approach to current difficulties in light of the widening divisions within Israeli society. We must be practical and realistic in assessing our options, which requires that we answer certain questions. Is it possible for us to continue to deal with Israeli society as a monolithic entity, one which has a unified stand towards peace, given the schism that exists in the Israeli body politic? Is it in Arab interests to continue to deal with Israeli proponents of peace in the way that we deal with those — including Ne-

tanyahu, Levy, Sharon and assorted right-wing religious party representatives — seeking to renege on their commitments to peace? And if not, then how should we act to further the cause of peace within Israeli society and marginalise those opposed to its implementation?

The Israeli establishment has always depended, since the beginnings of the state, on rallying international opinion and the support of the international community to its side. In many ways this is simply a continuation of the strategy the Zionist enterprise has always followed. It is simply that the focus of its efforts has shifted from London in the late 19th century to Washington in the late 20th century.

Israel, in its origins and subsequent practice as a state, has exerted tremendous efforts to influence international public opinion from within in order to garner an ever broadening base of support. It is a lesson that we could do well to learn in our own attempts to capitalise on those within Israel who have raised dissenting voices against the policies of the new Likud government.

But we should not, in seeking to accomplish our aims, look exclusively to the government. What is needed is broad based effort, operating on a political, intellectual and popular level. Consequently, it is of vital importance that we consolidate our efforts to understand the various elements at work within Israeli society, so as better to

capitalise on those elements supportive of peace.

We must identify those channels of communication that will prove most effective in furthering our cause, which is the cause of peace, and thus effectively marginalise those voices raised in opposition to any just and lasting settlement.

This is a long term task. We cannot hope to accomplish our aims in a matter of weeks or even months. Rather we face the prospect of years of concerted effort on the part of all those concerned with the future of peace in Egypt and throughout the region.

The rhetoric of war is a language no longer acceptable in international relations. Equally, the fruits of peace are not to be the monopoly of a single state in the region.

Israel cannot hope to benefit economically from peace unless it is willing to acknowledge the legitimate rights of the Palestinians, and to vacate those Arab territories, notably the Golan Heights, that it occupies. But severing diplomatic relations with Israel is no way to pressure an extremist government, such as that of Netanyahu, into recognising the logical constituents of a just peace. There are far more effective strategies for encouraging the Likud government to face reality.

It is essential that we keep our eyes on the fixed goals that have laid the foundations for the political and popular movement in the Arab world desirous of a sustainable peace. Only if it is universally accepted that security is a concern of all countries in the region and not of Israel alone can such a peace be realised. Israel's out-moded definition of security can no longer serve as a pretext to perpetuate its usurpation of Arab territory and Palestinian rights. For Israel to revive this one-sided logic of security will only act to impede any progress toward peace, restoring tension in the area.

It is necessary, then, that our non-governmental agenda in the coming phase be supportive of national and Arab resolve, epitomised by the efforts of our political leadership and Hosni Mubarak, to push forward the peace process by rallying pro-peace forces internationally, regionally, and within Israel itself. As we reach towards our ultimate objective, which is no less than a just and comprehensive peace, we must bear in mind that this goal is not impossible to achieve. The Arabs are not hamstringing in their efforts as some have asserted. Usurped rights must eventually be restored to their rightful claimants, no matter how long it takes.

Politics and the generation's battle

The Muslim Brotherhood is prey to the same generational conflicts that afflict all of Egyptian political life, writes **Nabil Abdel-Fattah**

At first glance it might appear that the withdrawal of 13 of the younger members of the Muslim Brotherhood would be of little consequence to the oldest and largest Islamic political organisation. Losing such an insignificant number is hardly likely to effect its long-established goal — i.e. the establishing of an Islamic state in Egypt and the Arab world — nor cause a revision of the universal system posited by successive generations of its leaders. Or is it?

Certainly any close inspection of just who these 13 members represent casts things in a different light. Significantly all 13 belong to the middle generation of the organisation, i.e. the generation that honed its political skills in the Islamist movement in Egyptian universities during the 70s and 80s. They are the activists who gained control of the professional syndicates from the 80s onwards, and who consequently can be seen as representatives of the political-occupational concerns of the professional, white collar classes.

Possessed of political, organisational and administrative skills of a high calibre, they added considerable vitality to the Brotherhood's political and organisational activities and have been instrumental in

helping to extend the Brotherhood's political influence beyond traditional channels. Most commonly, they belong to professions that would not be represented among the older generations of brothers. Products of the modern education system, they have accumulated a vast amount of experience in dealing with the various political forces in the country, and the course of their political careers many members have been detained and imprisoned.

This was the generation that laid the essential groundwork for the creation of a political party to represent the Muslim Brotherhood in the Egyptian political arena. The Wasat party, as both a project and a system of thought, represents a qualitative transition in the history of the Muslim Brotherhood with a platform indicating a willingness to remain open to the entire spectrum of current political ideas.

Given this background the withdrawal of just 13 members can be viewed as an important event. That the Office of the Supreme Guide gave the Wasat founders a month to choose between the party and their membership of the organisation indicates a serious generational problem in Egyptian politics. Within the Brotherhood

the old guard is tenacious in its dominance of the Office of the Supreme Guide, where every important decision is made. Younger members have so far been excluded from the highest echelons of the Brotherhood, a generational gap that has been compounded by the organisational rigidity that has resulted from the political and security confrontation with the government.

The disparity between the visions of the middle and older generations of the Brotherhood, each shaped by a different set of experiences and accumulated expertise, reflects divisions that exist in Egyptian political society at large. The generation that emerged during the period that preceded and followed World War II continues to dominate political life and political party activity in Egypt to the exclusion of younger generations. Those who became politically active in the 70s and 80s are excluded from influential positions within the political parties, government administration and the ministries, and Egyptian politics is thus deprived of the dynamism, skills and creativity the younger generations have to offer.

The current generation gap in the Muslim Brotherhood is likely to continue to effect the direction of

the organisation and its immediate future. Even if the older generation decides to accommodate some younger members within the existing power structure, the fact remains that the organisation is in thrall to a conservative social and political doctrine formulated by a generation shaped by the experiences of an age that no longer exists.

The organisation's elders, men such as Mustafa Mashhur and Ma'mun El-Hodeibi, have undoubtedly amassed a depth of expertise in their long careers. But the skills they acquired are no longer sufficient to ensure the manoeuvrability and flexibility that will allow the organisation to develop during a period of great change. The project to establish a party, and the withdrawal of those younger members of the Brotherhood committed to establishing that party, could well, in retrospect, represent an important turning point in the history of the organisation and in the thinking of an entire generation of Muslim Brothers.

The writer is editor-in-chief of the book section of the Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies and director of the Unit for Social and Legal Research.

To The Editor

Shebl sorely missed

Sir - It has been touching to read the tributes paid in your pages to Mohamed Shebl and I should be grateful for the chance to add my own. For 18 years we lived in the same house in Maadi. We had many interests in common and knew many of the same people. He was our friend and nearest neighbour, and never during all those years did we ever have the slightest disagreement. For that reason alone, we saw each other all too infrequently. The era we live in is full of untimely deaths, but this was a particular shock.

A true gentleman, Mohamed was unfailingly considerate of people, even when his patience had been sorely tried, as it often was, not just by the nature of things, but also because no one I have known ever had such bad luck.

His defiance of fate found expression in a glorious sense of humour and incredibly hard work. Strong, heroically cheerful, he was a life-enhancer — a man who consistently and repeatedly tried to

give more back to life than life had given him, a man to whom his friends, casual acquaintances, and an international public at large owe much. He will be deeply missed, not least in my own household.

John Rodenbeck
Maadi

Remembering a friend

Sir - I'm one of Mohamed Shebl's acquaintances and I take pride in considering myself his friend as he made numerous people around him feel and believe.

I speak passionately and I beg you to receive my words as such. I invite all those who knew him, chatted with him, loved him, and loved his work to gather in a tribe, as I would like to call it. This tribe would be a society-friendly group which would function in various capacities including doing charity work in Mohamed Shebl's name.

Though Shebl may well have laughed at the idea, my heart tells me that the memory of his gracious nature would thereby be preserved.

Lamia Ibrahim
Canael Radio
Ismailia

Where was Otello?

Sir - In your 29 August - 4 September issue, we read the wonderful news of the upcoming "Festival of the Alexandrias of the World" with the performance of Verdi's *Otello* at Qait Bey Fortress as one of the highlights. We purchased tickets from Mix Travel, the transportation sponsor of the festival, booked hotel rooms for our party of 10 and drove to Alexandria on the 27th of September.

After an early dinner we dressed for the occasion and since neither the promised shuttle service from the hotel nor the "special buses" stationed all

over Alexandria materialised, we hailed some taxis to take us to Qait Bey.

Can you imagine my disappointment (to put it mildly) when embarrassed guards told us that the performance had been cancelled!

Problems can always arise when planning such a major event. But it seems to me that the organisers should have had at least the courtesy to inform the ticket holders, especially since that night's performance had not been the first to be cancelled.

May I quote Mr Hassan Abu Sheib, "The aim of the festival... is to promote Alexandria as a tourist and cultural city. Visitors will never forget the performance of *Otello* at Qait Bey."

Gisela Berger
Heliopolis

The lion of Sinai

Sir - The lion of Sinai was the epithet of our glorious soldier, Sayed Zakareya, given to him by the

Israeli soldier who killed him 23 years ago during the October War.

A few months back, the Israeli soldier handed over Zakareya's identity card along with other documents to our ambassador to Germany.

He related the story to the world media as follows: "Though all Zakareya's comrades fell in action during the Israeli onslaught, Zakareya kept on fighting alone, killing 28 Israelis. Killing him was quite a job. I have kept all of his documents with me since then, as a souvenir of the rare valour he displayed during the fighting. Please confer on him the Order of Merit."

During the liberation of Sinai in October 1973, when my first daughter was born, I named her Sinai. In October 1996, I named my newly born son Asad Sinay (the lion of Sinai), after our great hero Zakareya. May his soul rest in peace.

Mahmoud Elewa
Victory College
Maadi



Caracalla's Elissa, Queen of Carthage — more fun corpse-wise than Hamlet and Il Trovatore put together

Fly by night

David Blake watches the flowers of the forest bloom

Caracalla: Dance Theatre (Lebanon); Elissa, Queen of Carthage; Cairo Opera House, Main Hall, 11 Oct

Forget Virgil, forget Bertoldo and his Trojan and think of the Offenbach opera *La Belle Helene*. Only then will you know where you are with Elissa. Caracalla is the brash, noisiest show since Nero enjoyed the fire of Rome or the Greeks burned Troy.

Caracalla is no ballet, it's a pop folly, a jazzed-up, rock-a-bye-baby fantasy around the mysterious aftermath of the Trojan war. In just ten years enough story lines, plots, myths and legends were thrown up to keep the performing arts happy for a millennium and more. Something special occurred. Caracalla, too, is special. Full of juice as an overripe mango, it spills its strangely perfumed aromas over wide areas.

Laugh at it or with it is the problem facing the audience of this rowdy spectacle. Caracalla believes in extremes. Everything is pushed around, story-line, body-line and sign-line, right up to and over the top. Don't consider the story, simply watch the troupe, the running, jumping, grunting show. It is dedicated to the send-up of almost everything except the music, which helps to form the organised dotiness of Caracalla.

It could be a trend-setter. First, forget your body, because you are nobody at all in Caracalla. It's not only costume, it's costume-consumed. No body ever shows.

The dancers are smothered in gear, rugs like horse blankets, drapes, picnic tablecloths, rags. The men, winter season beginning, rifle their friends' stables, beginning at the neck and covering themselves until nothing shows but the feet. For girls something lighter, window curtains and things that flow out behind. But for all and everyone nothing to be seen-through, no body show. Surprising how sexy it all is.

Then the company sets all this dress wear aloft; they never stop jumping. The choreography is not inventive but by continuous repetition the effect is hypnotic. A large cast of dancers, from curtain up to finish, is kept flying across the stage in rows, criss-crossing in different directions. Lines of flying carpets with heads and feet and nothing in the middle but yards of kilims and winter woolies. They race past, crying out, grunting, and talking. Add to this the sound effects of the sea breaking on rocks and sandy beaches, war cries,

love-lust and every kind of insect noise, and you have a solid impenetrable wall of cacophony. With the carpets in the air it is a fair knock-out.

The dancers are devilish devils of energy and courage. They hurl themselves into every kind of distorted movement, the story vaguely hanging around the tale of Dido/Elissa. She leaves Pygmalion, murderous brother, and makes for somewhere near Tunis. On landing she is raped by the king of the savages, and then forced into a spear point wedding. Distressed, she leaps into a pot of flames and roasts herself into history.

After the single interval, Elissa goes into overdrive. Ships arrive very successfully. Carthage is built out of hat-boxes. Mermen come. There is belly-dancing. The city is finished. Elissa's boyfriend is strangled. Her great travelling friend from Tyre is knifed, and her new friend, the king, is busy carving up and roasting her acquaintances. It is more fun corpse-wise than *Hamlet* and *Il Trovatore* put together, if only because, unlike them, there is no reason for anything. It just whirls on. No one is ever tired, least of all the audience. It's like a horse-race. It peps up towards the end. The final laps are the very best. Audience and Dido are merely loose, meaningless leaves from the book of the ages. As if we didn't know.

The real show, the genuine thing, is the Lebanese *dabka*. The music increases in speed and flying and leaping becomes traumatic. It is a dazzle how they do it. And into this scene comes Mr Caracalla, a refugee from the book of Time itself. He speaks, sings, dances and is himself like some great figure out of classical drama. He doesn't stop. Caracalla, like the rock of ages, doesn't stop. And it's time to go home, but no one does. Even the audience begins to dance. This is a night of dedication if ever there was one.

Cairo Symphony Orchestra; Great Symphonies (1); Beethoven Symphony No 4 B flat major op 60; Beethoven Symphony No 6 F major op 68 (Pastorale); Conductor Ahmed El-Saedi; Cairo Opera House, Main Hall; 10 Oct

This concert presented musical flowers from what used to be called the vegetable world. Nothing to do with onions or leeks, but flowers proper, very fresh, from field and forest. Daisies and edelweiss.

The two pieces under review both gave off the same special aroma — call

it dedication, expertise, or something not encountered very often in these tough times, heart. No swaggering bulk, but dedicated artists working hard.

There is no need of criticism — nothing pinched, or sour, but something much harder to explain and define, probably to do with love. Unfortunately that word seemed to go up with the bomb. So we are left with certain shreds of grandeur, something essential to these works.

These days Ahmed El-Saedi is often at his desk, and nights too — more's the pity. Of course we must see other batons waving as well as his. But often when he kicks the desk and comes out onto the platform to work with his orchestra the results are astounding. So with this concert.

Two Beethovens so close together are for long-distance runners rather than those specialising in the quick sprint. The Opera House was very well filled, and with an audience not often seen these days — those who come to listen, not to be seen. Cairo does have some of these musical angels left amidst the hurly burly and they were at the Opera to pay attention to the performance in hand.

Beethoven's No 4 is an easier deal than the legendary symphonies. It can't be overlooked but it can get the parking ticket which says move on, we have no space.

El-Saedi handled this strange and almost delicate thing with great appreciation and care. It was like smelling a new perfume in a splendid old mansion. This fourth, and later the sixth, was given a refreshing treatment, shyness and far from academic.

The fourth symphony seems a frontier area — the last of the known territory ends here. It finishes close to the faded places of the unknown. The music of the fourth gives us tremors of anticipation. Beethoven is a sharp listener to his own sounds. They seem to say: shall we make it before the wolves get us? Exciting that the fourth suggests these things while circumventing anything so solid as affirmation.

The opening big chords for orchestra came, making holes in the fabric. B flat major is a strong, eerie but positive, key, not like B flat minor. The orchestra was fresh, sounding new and playing as one. Strings go through the entire work, deeply singing, shadowy like the music, but never thin and always with a sleek vibrato. Pleasure

reigned. The winds were alight and aloft — all night the flute sang like a lark and the brass was inspired, firm and fearless.

The second movement showed the conductor at his best, delectably clean and almost edgy but composed. The long end showed varying colours. We seemed to go upstairs in the mansion of this fourth. We were young, taking the staircase three steps at a time. On our way down, though, we had grown, descending step by step, youngish, but behaved.

Conductor and orchestra did everything with notes, which is, of course, how it should be but seldom is. The minutiae deepened the mystery of here and now when there is none of either. And the orchestra had become, as it remained all evening, the voice of the sibil.

Then No 6. They call it the *Pastorale*, but what its creator really thought of it is unknown. Things are laid out for instant recognition — or so it is sometimes thought. The cinema made so much fuss about the birds and the beasts, the storms and rainbows that No 6 is easier to see as a picture on the wall rather than music.

This is where the concert took wing and flew into new areas, new colours, chasing away the overlay of time. El-Saedi clearly had intentions. The fourth symphony intimated that we would have no established academic showing of the pastoral world and we did not. We had a steady flow of tempo, no sudden speed and nothing big. Indeed, the big pastoral has almost disappeared from the late twentieth century. Birds and beasts are a threatened species.

El-Saedi used the basic constructions which, in spite of its romantic surface, lie beneath the pastoral, holding the entire work together. He never let the storm off the leash and there was no effort at photographic realism. A few black notes made a storm. Horns and wings playing divinely made a rainbow. We had a breath of Siegfried and the summer night of der Meistersinger, but no lingering over the future fate of the pastoral. Grass and leaves blowing in the wind were abandoned for something more witty and terse. It worked. Sibilis don't really answer questions, they simply pose new riddles. And that was the way with the orchestra and maestro of this concert.

Was that the pastoral symphony of Beethoven that just went by?

EXHIBITIONS

Rezaul Soliman (Paintings)
Extra Gallery, 3 El-Nasr St, Zamalek. Tel 340 6293. Daily 10.30am-3pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 26 Oct.
A rare showing of works by one of Egypt's most celebrated painters, concentrated on the alleyway Khosh Kadam.

Mahmoud Seif AlIslam (Paintings)
Cairo-Bara Gallery, 17 Youssef El-Ghazali St, Bab El-Louk. Tel 393 1704. Daily exc Sun, 12pm-4pm. Until 26 Oct.

Group Exhibition
Spiral Arts Gallery, 6 Road 77C, Golf Area, Maadi. Tel 351 4362. Daily exc Sat afternoon and Sun, 10am-3pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 26 Oct.
Exhibition of works by four Egyptian artists: Sayed Zaki, Sayed Mohamed Sayed, Fathy Afifi and Said Kamel.

Deborah Doyle
Sany Gallery, AUC, El-Shaikh Rihan St, Tahrir. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 9am-12pm & 4pm-6pm. Until 24 Oct.
Photographic exhibition under the somewhat predictable title "Faces of Traditional Egypt".

Najah Taber (Watercolours)
Khan El-Magharabi Gallery, 18 El-Monasser Mohamed St, Zamalek. Tel 340 3349. Daily exc Sun, 10.30am-3pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 26 Oct.

The Cairo Art Guild
Extra Gallery, Main Campus, AUC, El-Shaikh Rihan St. Tel 357 5436. Daily exc Fri, 9am-5pm. Until 30 Oct.
Photographic works, sculptures and paintings by 15 artists from Egypt, Australia, Germany and Switzerland.

Omar El-Fayoumi
Espacio Gallery, 1 El-Sherif St, Downtown. Tel 393 1699. Daily exc Fri, 10am-3pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 31 Oct.

Group Exhibition
Donia Gallery, 28 Abdel-Aziz Gawish St, across Mohamed Mahmoud St, Bab El-Louk. Tel 353 8357. Daily exc Fri, 12pm-3pm. Until 14 Nov.

Animals in Egyptian Art
Rare Books and Special Collections Library, corner of El-Shaikh Rihan and Monasser Sts, Downtown. Tel 357 5436. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 9am-12pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 30 Nov.

The Museum of Mr and Mrs Mohamed Mahmoud Khalil
1 Kefour El-Akhdid St, Dokki. Tel 336 2376. Daily exc Mon, 10am-4pm. Egypt's largest collection of nineteenth century European art, amassed by the late Mahmoud Khalil.

Egyptian Museum
Tahrir St, Downtown. Tel 575 4319. Daily exc Fri, 9am-5pm; Fri 9am-11.15am & 1pm-3pm.

Coptic Museum
Mar Girgis, Old Cairo. Tel 362 8766. Daily exc Fri, 9am-4pm; Fri 9am-11am & 1pm-3pm.

Islamic Museum
Port Said St, Ahmed Maher St, Bab El-Khalq. Tel 390 9803/9804. Daily exc Fri, 9am-4pm; Fri 9am-11.30am & 2pm-4pm.

Museum of Modern Egyptian Art
Chateau Pyramide, 9 Mohamed Al-Ghazali St, Giza. Tel 340 6861. Daily exc Mon, 10am-1pm & 5pm-9pm.

Mohamed Nagui Museum
Chateau Pyramide, 9 Mohamed Al-Ghazali St, Giza.

Mahmoud Mokhtar Museum
Tahrir St, Giza. Daily exc Sun and Mon, 9am-1.30pm.
A permanent collection of works by the sculptor Mahmoud Mokhtar (d. 1934), whose genuine monument to Saad Zaghloul stands near Qasr El-Nil Bridge, and whose Egypt Awakening became, somewhat belatedly, an icon of post-revolutionary Egypt.

Mission Impossible
Mars, 35 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 393 3897. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. El-Horreya II, El-Horreya Mall, Romy, Heliopolis. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. El-Nil St. Tel 374 7436. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm, 9.30pm & midnight.
Intense action and fabulous special effects, with Tom Cruise.

Tora Sea's Forbidden Love
Jouissance Cultural Centre, 106 Qasr El-Aini St, Garden City. Tel 353 5962. 17 Oct, 6pm.

Ganesh Ka Fala
Mahmoud Abdel Kalam Arab Centre for Indian Culture, 27 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 392 5162. 17 Oct, 6pm.
Singing Shah Rukh Khan.

Commercial cinema change their programmes every Monday. The information provided is valid to check with the cinema. Arabic films are seldom subtitled. For information, contact the venue.

Nazra (The Fling)
Cosmos II, 12 Enadad St, Downtown. Tel 779 337. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 357 5033. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Romy, Heliopolis. Tel 238 0344. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm & 6pm. Cairo Sheraton, El-Giza St, Giza. Tel 360 6081. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm & 6.30pm.
The Egyptian version of Fata Morgana, starring Ahmed Zaki, Youssef and Sherine Reda.

El-Zaman Wal-Khalq (The Age of Dogs)
Lila, 25 Enadad St, Downtown. Tel 360 284. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Ighral (Assassination)
Rome Palace, 17 El-Aly St, Enadad St, Downtown. Tel 924 727.

Listings

Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. With Nadia El-Ghazali.

Ragui Mohamud Geddani (VTP)
Tiba II, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Cosmos II, 12 Enadad St, Downtown. Tel 779 337. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. El-Horreya, El-Horreya St, Giza. Tel 385 8358. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Nasser '56
Rivoli II, 26th July St, Downtown. Tel 357 5033. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.
Ahmed Zaki, in the title role, makes a credible stab at impersonating the mannerisms of the late president.

Egypt Mashrouha (Milit Liaisons)
Sphinx, Sphinx St, Mohandessin. Tel 346 4017. Daily 8pm, 10pm, 12.30am, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. El-Nil St. Tel 374 7436. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm, 9.30pm & 9.30pm.

Father of The Bride II
El-Horreya I, El-Horreya Mall, Romy, Heliopolis. Tel 238 0344. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. El-Nil St. Tel 374 7436. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm, 9.30pm & 9.30pm.

Independence Day
Radio, 24 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 375 6562. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Nasser II, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 374 7436. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm, 9.30pm & 9.30pm.

Dischord
Tahrir, 112 Tahrir St, Dokki. Tel 333 5726. Daily 3pm, 6pm & 9pm: Sat & Sun midnight show.

Acc Ventura: When Nature Calls
Karam II, 15 Enadad St, Downtown. Tel 924 830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Critical Decision
MCM, Moudi Grand Mall, Kollaya El-Nasr St, Maadi. Tel 352 3066. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Karam I, 15 Enadad St, Downtown. Tel 924 830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Money Train
Karam I, 15 Enadad St, Downtown. Tel 924 830. Fri & Sat midnight show.

El-Zaman (The Leader)
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Karam I, 15 Enadad St, Downtown. Tel 924 830. Fri & Sat midnight show.

In celebration of the Austrian Millennium 1996-1996, the orchestra conducted by Ahmed El-Saedi, will perform selections from Webern, Mozart, Schubert and Mahler.

Pope II
Melina Hall, Opera House, as above, 19 Oct, 8pm.
Conducted by Mounir Nagui, Omar Khairat on the piano will perform his own compositions.

Autism String Quartet
Institute of Music for Special Children, 20 Adly St, Kodak Passage, Downtown. Tel 360 1746. 20 Oct, 8pm.
Conducted by Inobit Adamson, the quartet will perform selections from Fauré, Cuck, Borodin, Haydn and Mozart.

Festival of The Nile
Ewert Hall, Main Campus, AUC, El-Shaikh Rihan St. Tel 357 5436. 23 Oct, 8pm.
Oriental and Western music performed by Amira Fouad (piano), Nivea Al-Husseini (soprano), Walid Karamy (tenor), Claudia (harp) and Kai Ghaussen (violin).

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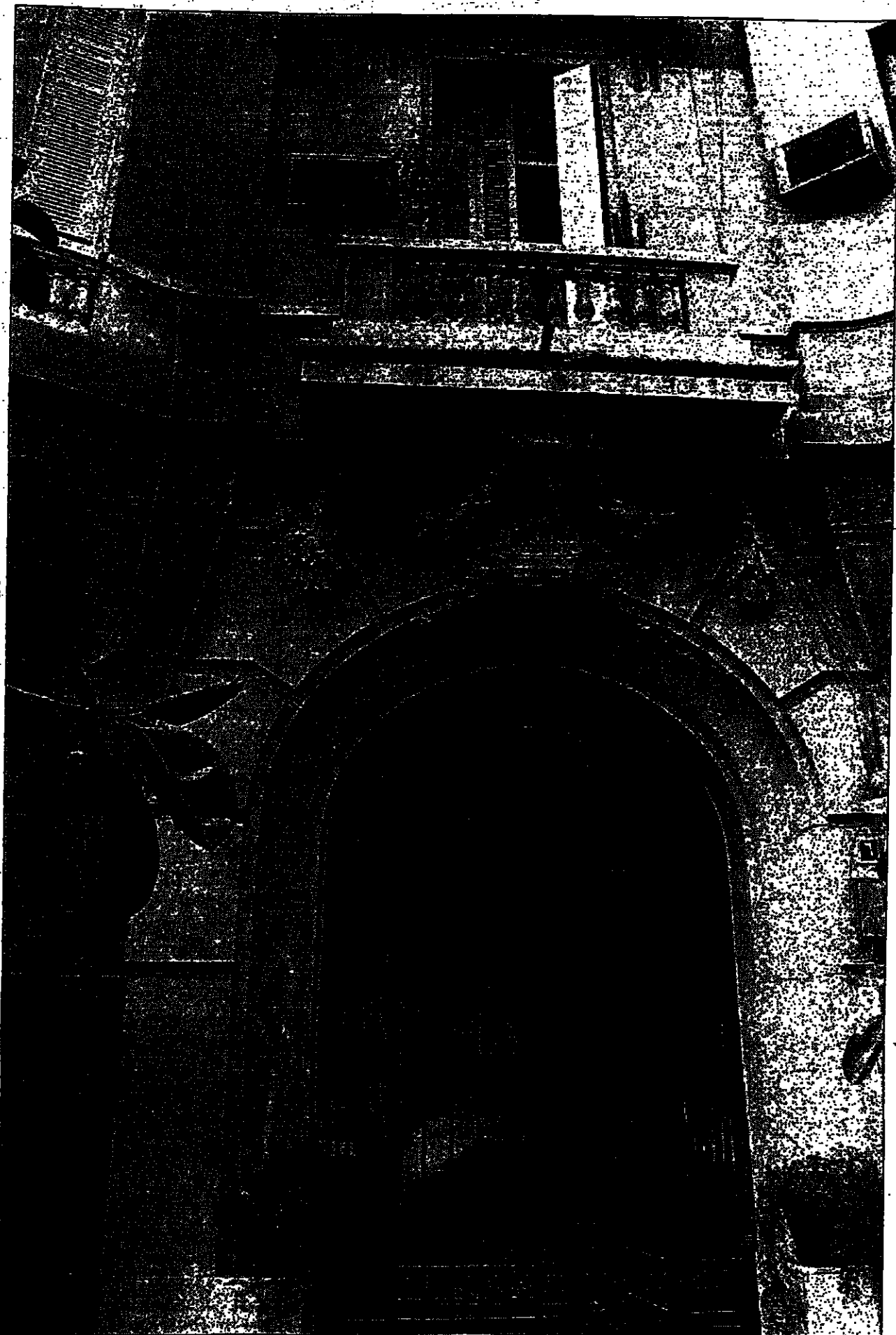
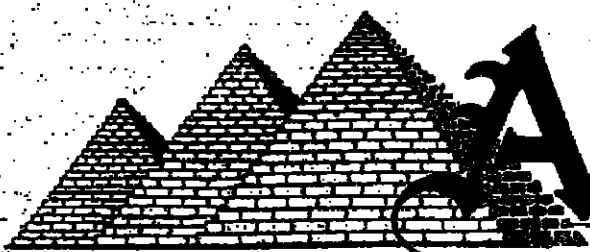
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Vandals at the gate



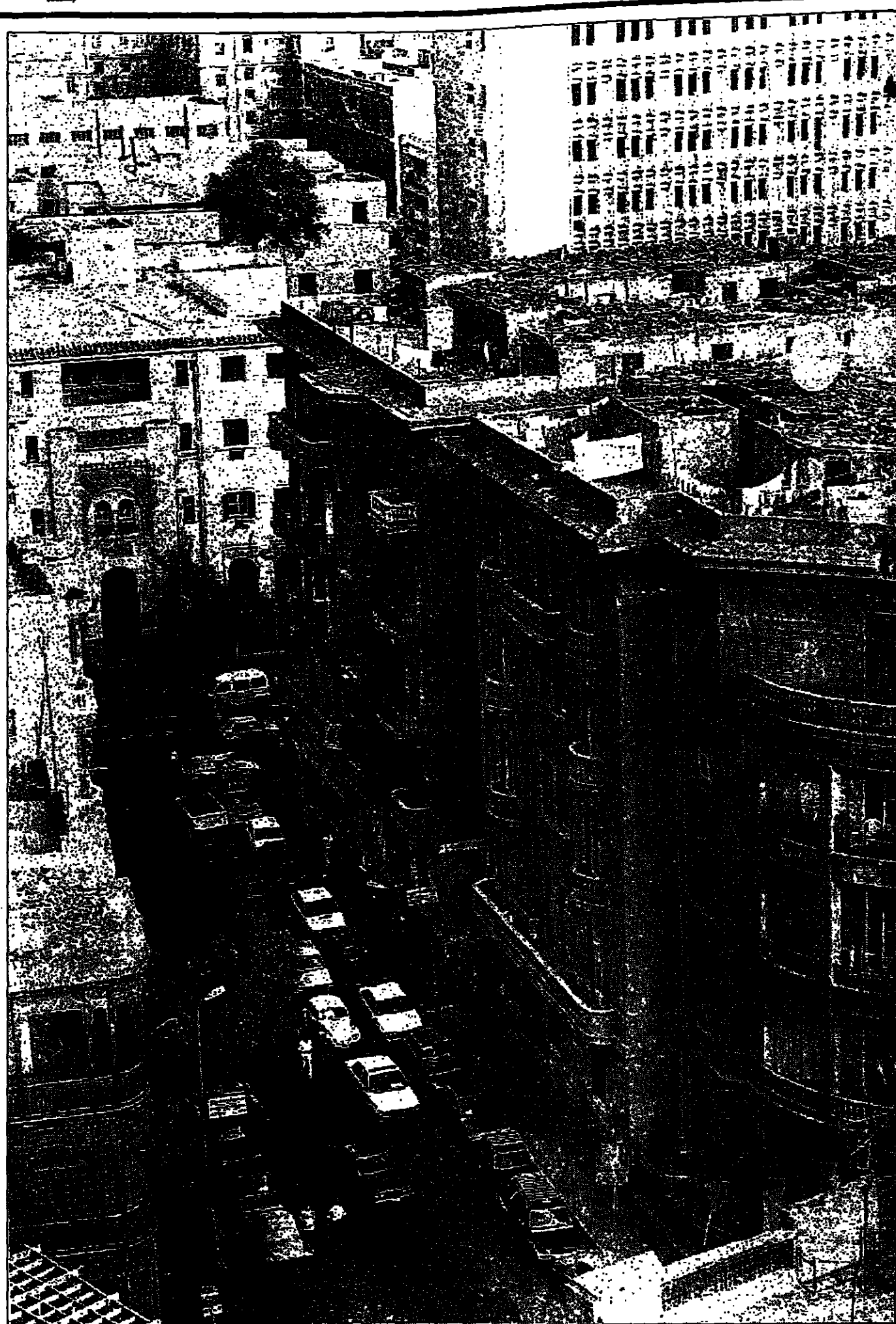
Few cities in the world can boast the multi-layered architectural heritage that characterises 1,000 year old Cairo. Yet to maintain the fragile architectural fabric of the city in the face of the competing demands of an ever-growing population is a colossal task. The problems facing the monuments of Islamic Cairo are well documented, while the imposing villas and apartment buildings dating from the late 19th century are constantly threatened with demolition. Last week President Mubarak dismissed the deputy governor of Cairo following the destruction of a Garden City villa, despite a decree protecting buildings of architectural or historic importance. For *Al-Ahram Weekly*, which has consistently campaigned for the preservation of Egypt's architectural heritage, this was cause for celebration. In this 4-page supplement the *Weekly* tells the story of Garden City, once a by-word for restrained, elegant architecture, but now the focus of the attention of property developers and the bulldozers they inevitably bring.

Castles of dust

Once the site of festivities celebrating the overflowing of the Nile, until the 1952 Revolution, Garden City was home to the powerful, the rich and the famous. In the '90s, write **Samir Sobhi** and

Fayza Hassan, its glorious days are over. Banks and office buildings look down on the narrow streets; every vestige of past splendour is being actively erased.

Randa Shaath's lens has captured the little that is left of this turn of the century quarter, but even this little is now threatened: developers are ready to pounce and to pay the price to impoverished owners who often have no other choice but to sell, destroying Egypt's unique architectural heritage in the process



On crossroads: Gamal El-Din Abul-Mahasen Street meets Qasr El-Aini Street

Garden City rose from the waters during the 12th and 13th centuries when the Nile veered westwards, revealing an immense expanse of land which became known as the lands of *El-Louk*. Various rulers erected midans, planted gardens and bred horses in parts of the new area. At one point, tanneries were established, located around what is today Sherif Street — once known as *El-Madabegh* (tanneries) Street — but the inhabitants of the area complained so much about the smell that they were eventually moved to Fustat in 1865. The lands of *El-Louk* were reached by crossing over *El-Khalig El-Masri*, the waterway which ran through the city, laying out the course followed by the present Port Said Street. To this effect, *El-Saleh Negmeddin* had a small bridge built in 1241.

Princely grounds

As rulers came and went the location of the main midans was changed according to the whims of who was in power. Baybars laid out his *midan* to cover the area which is now Midan El-Tahrir and northern Garden City. *El-Nasser Mohamed Ibn Qalauun* transformed this midan into a lush orchard with fruit trees and plants, many of which were imported from Syria. The gardens were splendid, directly overlooking the banks of the Nile to the west. To reward Prince Qoussoun for his services, *El-Nasser* gave him the gardens as a present. Qoussoun was more interested in horses than plants and soon had the place transformed into breeding grounds.

Around the same time, two islands, now known as *El-Gezira El-Wusta* (the middle island, also known as the Exhibition

Grounds) and *Zamalek* appeared in the river. At times, when the Nile was low, *El-Gezira El-Wusta* connected with Qoussoun's farm. *El-Nasser* himself established another midan, closer to the mouth of *El-Khalig El-Masri* (around today's Fum *El-Khalig*) on the southern side of Garden City.

To build his own breeding farm, a large area had to be dug out, creating a depression which filled with water and formed a lake, the *Birka El-Nasseriya*; it is on and around this lake that festivities took place in late August every year, at the time of the cutting of the dam, when the Nile reached a certain level on the Roda Island Nilometre, an event known as *Wafa' El-Nile* (the fulfilling of the Nile's promise).

The ceremonies accompanying the rising of the Nile gradually died out after *El-Khalig El-Masri*, whose waters had become stagnant and a source of epidemics, was finally refilled by order of Lord Cromer in 1897, making way for the tramway and Port Said Street. This street follows the course of what was once a busy waterway.

During the reign of *Ismail*, three palaces were built in Garden City, all of them with gardens directly sloping westward toward the Nile. The *Qasr El-Ali* (or high palace) built by Ibrahim Pasha — *Ismail* inherited it from his father but then gave it to his mother, *Ismail's* older brother, *Ahmed Pasha*, owned the second palace (which remained unoccupied after his death in a train accident). *Ismailia Palace*, the new residence *Ismail* built for himself, occupied the area of the present Mugauma

and all of what is now Midan Tahrir, up to Talaat Harb Street. The grounds of the three palaces combined covered the whole area of Garden City and extended to the banks of the river to the west, *Qasr El-Aini Hospital* to the south, *Qasr El-Nil Bridge* to the North and *Qasr El-Aini Street* to the east.

Advent of the city

Ismail's urbanisation drive extended to the lands of *El-Louk*, cutting out large avenues and building comfortably wide footpaths to accommodate pedestrians. This area became the throbbing heart of the city. A stone's throw from this centre, Garden City was to become a favourite residential area for the following generations.

Ali Mubarak mentions in the *Khatat Tawfiqiya* that, within the walls of the *Ismailia Palace*, on the side nearest to the *Qasr El-Nil Bridge*, there was a mosque known as the *Mosque of El-Abit* ("the Idiot"), which contained the sepulchres of *Sheikh El-Abit* and *Sheikh Ziad*. As the legend goes, according to *Mohamed Kamal El-Sayed Mohamed in Cairo, the Victorious Names and Meanings*, the two sheikhs were in fact bandits, with no title to sainthood but a good deal of luck.

The *Omar Makram Mosque* occupies the location of *El-Abit Mosque*. To the west of the mosque, *Omar Makram Street* was called *El-Abit Mosque Street*. This street used to separate the mosque from the building housing the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, originally the palace of *Kamaleddin Hussein*, the son of *Sultan Hussein Kamel*. Until the beginning of the 1960s, commuters crossing *Qasr El-Nil Bridge* on

their way to Midan El-Tahrir could see an imposing affair of red brick and cream stucco, a revival gothic fantasy subsequently pulled down to make room for the underpass which replaced Midan El-hami. This was the palace of *Qout El-Qulub*, daughter of *Abdel-Rehim Pasha El-Demerdash*. Its towers commanded a breathtaking view of the Nile.

Gami' El-Abit Street led to Midan *Qasr El-Dubara* (*Simon Bolivar*), on which had once stood the palace belonging to *Princess Amina*, daughter of *Prince Elhami*, granddaughter of *Abbas Helmi I*, wife of *Khedive Tawfik* and mother of *Abbas Helmi II*. The palace occupied the grounds on which the new *Shepherd's Hotel* was erected recently and reached *Lazoghli Street* to the south. The street separated the palace grounds from those of the British Embassy, while to the east it reached *Latin America Street*, previously known as *El-Walida* (in reference to *Abbas Helmi II's* mother).

Another street was named after another illustrious mother, *Khedive Ismail's*. Now renamed *Aisha El-Taymouriya*, it is thought that this street, long referred to as *El-Walida Pasha Street*, divided the grounds between the *Qasr El-Ali* (given by *Ismail* to his mother) and *Ahmed Pasha's* palace. *Aisha El-Taymouriya* later had a house on this street. At the point where the street to which she gave her name meets the corniche, a pink and white high-rise under construction towers over those of its neighbours which have so far escaped destruction.

Not far away, on the same line, the *Sabai's villa*, one of the gems of Garden City,

was not so lucky. It has been mercilessly pulled down, but the reason for this wanton destruction is still unclear, since no multi-million multi-storey tower has been erected on the site.

At the turn of the century and until the July 1952 Revolution, *Qasr El-Dubara*, by far the most prestigious quarter of Cairo, gathered an old aristocracy within its narrow periphery. Its character was definitively altered when the American Embassy compound was established on the grounds of *Villa Shedid*, where older generations of the cosmopolitan elite remember dancing many evenings away to the sound of live bands when they were not cruising the Nile on the *Shedids'* pleasure craft, moored close by. Now, every morning, the footpaths are crowded with aspirants clutching their passports and awaiting coveted visas. Parking is well-nigh impossible and the whole quarter seems to be in a permanent state of transition. It is now geared towards accommodating the tastes of the thousands of tourists who descend daily on the five-star hotels nearby. Banks and travel agencies have established themselves in the area and most of the original dwellers have disappeared.

Memories of splendour

A lone reminder of times gone by, *historian Adel Sabet's villa*, opposite the US Embassy, remains a testimony to past splendour and a unique example of faithful preservation. The villa, says *Sabet* — a direct descendant of *Soliman El-Fransawi* — was bought by his maternal grandmother to be given as a wedding present to her

daughter. He has lived in it all his life and changed little. He has witnessed the "development" of this most exclusive quarter with a sort of amused resignation.

He understands the economics of change and shrugs slightly. Houses such as his are exorbitantly expensive to maintain. One has to make compromises. Not everyone can afford to spend, or will choose to give up, millions in order to conserve a brief history. Besides, this area was heavily lequestrated at the time of the revolution and many people had to give up their houses, which then fell prey to developers.

Times change. *Sabet* remembers the lavish receptions given at the house, the illustrious guests invited by his parents. He recalls the exclusive tennis club around the corner, where his mother used to play tennis with the other ladies living nearby. *Sabet* seems more intrigued than saddened by what he sees. He casts the detached glance of the historian on the frenzy of construction and reconstruction that goes on all around him. He staunchly sits on his balcony every day with his books, within earshot of the diabolical racket emanating from a new construction site on the opposite side of the road. "It increases the value of my property," he jokes with a mischievous smile. He has no plans to sell although the price of land competes favourably with prices in the most elegant parts of Paris.

Pomp of empire

Qasr El-Dubara came to being at the turn of the century while, a little further to the south, Garden City was being designed in keeping with the purely residential char-

Recycling history

As attention focuses on the restoration of Egyptian antiquities, officials at the Fulbright Commission are calling for private sector involvement in preserving 19th and 20th centuries villas, writes **Nermeen El Nawawi**

Garden City has been home to the Fulbright Commission since its establishment in Egypt 47 years ago. Today, officials at the commission are spearheading a drive to save Garden City's architectural character.

The American organisation, which focuses on educational and cultural exchange between Egypt and the US, first set up house in the Belmont Building, Garden City's famous 30-storey building overlooking the Nile. But, in November 1995, Fulbright moved its offices to the top floor of a three-storey villa, built around 1900 on *Gamaleddin Abul-Mahasen Street*.

Ann Boss Radwan, Fulbright's executive director, explained how Fulbright renovated the villa's entire third floor, together with the building entrance, staircase and elevator.

The rationale behind repairing an 820-square-metre space in an old villa, said *Radwan*, lays in Fulbright's belief in safeguarding history, particularly the beautiful villas built in the 19th and 20th centuries.

One gets a definite turn of the century feeling upon entering the villa's renovated wooden elevator. Slow but strong, the elevator has a pear-like lantern hanging from its ceiling and a thin off-white tapestry covering its wooden interior base.

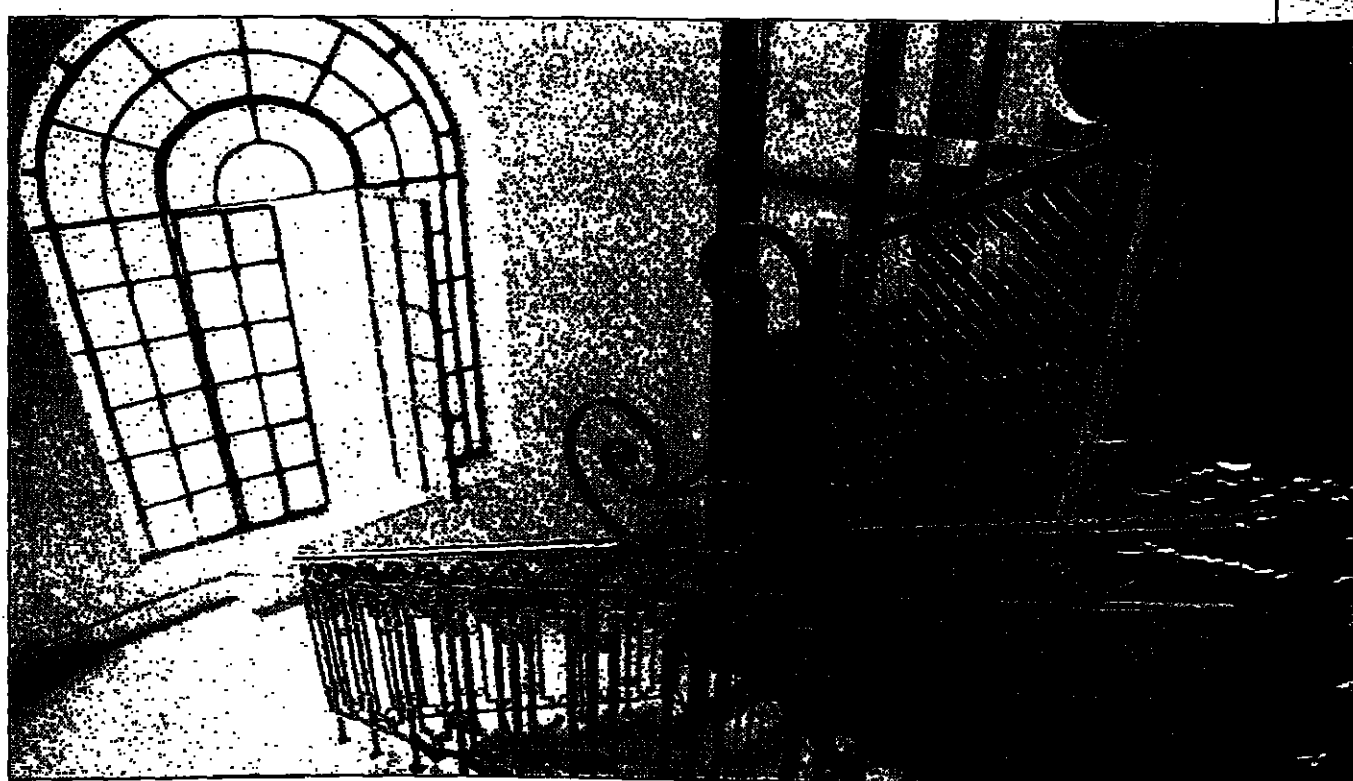
The new offices consist of an entrance space, reception area,

and two other salons or guest-rooms for concerts, lectures, and seminars. Classic chandeliers hang from each room's ceilings and modern lanterns light the sides of the rooms. French windows feature three rich shades of yellow, blue and brown.

"We have turned this place into a high-tech office while retaining its architectural integrity," said *Radwan*. Fulbright, she added, spent \$157,000 to restore the entire flat and furnish it after taking it over from the Library of Congress. The entire process took almost eight months.

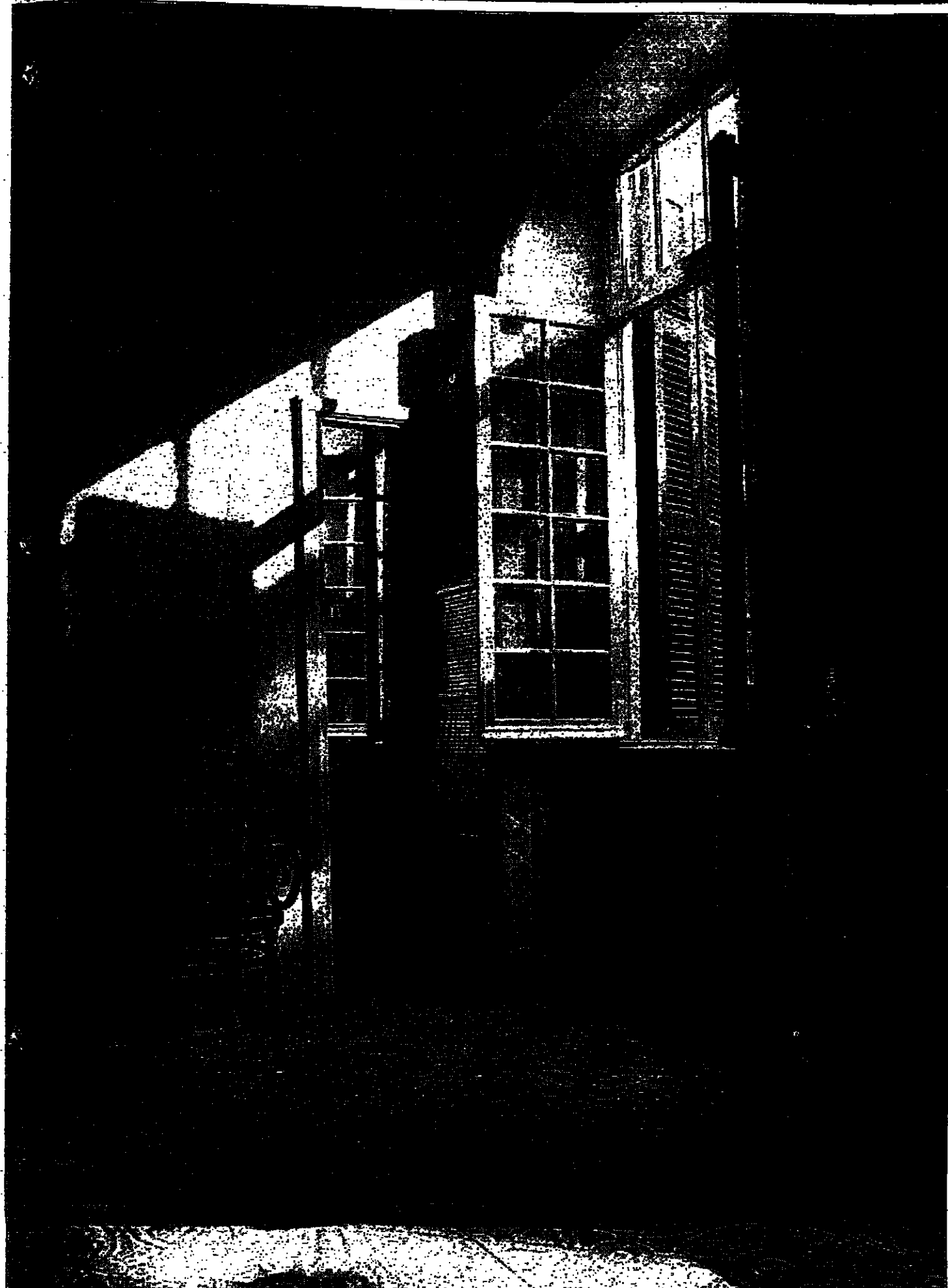
Taking the time to do things properly is essential, emphasised *Radwan*, in order to initiate historic preservation. Fulbright's objective here, she added, is to show companies that it is profitable and cost-effective to take the time to restore rather than buy a couple of floors in a modern high-rise.

"We want to interest companies in recycling buildings while maintaining their basic infrastructure," *Radwan* said. "What companies can do that is economically viable and how they can do it is what should be focused on during the coming period," she said. By transforming the buildings into, for example, conference or wedding centres, embassies, private companies, concert halls, or health spas, their owners might retain the value of the buildings and make a profit.



The entrance and elevator of the building restored to house the Fulbright Commission

هكذا من الأصل



Little has changed in the Pensionnat de la Mère de Dieu. Built in 1924 it has conserved its air of quiet permanence

acter it was intended to have. Unlike Helopolis with its grid of wide avenues laid out in straight lines and intersecting at right angles, Garden City followed a British model of urbanisation, featuring narrow streets meandering round and round to end up where they started, dotted with palatial villas and small blocks of flats built in the middle of extensive English gardens.

A popular belief was that the British planned Garden City as a maze in order to discourage demonstrators from marching on the area which sheltered important business and Egyptian political figures, the families of British officials and almost everyone who was rich, famous and anxious to gravitate around the British. It was also the site of the British Embassy, built around 1902.

One group of people did fall victim to the British design, as the story goes. In 1956, during his famous speech at Manshiya, Gamal Abdel-Nasser uttered the code word which was to propel certain officials to take over all the buildings owned by the company of the Suez Canal. This was done according to schedule everywhere except in Garden City, where the officials lost themselves in the winding streets and finally arrived at destination half an hour late. The theory, however, has been discounted by many strategists who claim that it is difficult to build barricades and easier to control a demonstration on wide boulevards.

Whatever the reason, Garden City was a British creation and it was to become very much a focal point in British-dominated social and political life at the time of the

Second World War.

"The first wartime headquarters of the British army in Egypt was the Semiramis, a luxuriously gloomy Edwardian hotel on the banks of the Nile," writes Artemis Cooper. "It remained the Headquarters of British Troops in Egypt, while the actual administration of the war moved to a modern bloc of flats known as Grey Pillars at the southern end of Garden City, off Sharia Kasr el-Aini. GHQ continued to expand. Soon it outgrew Grey Pillars. First it took over a large villa, then a street, and before long the compound of GHQ occupied an entire neighbourhood in Garden City, surrounded by checkpoints and coiled barbed wires... in the hazy morning light, the staff of GHQ turned the street into a river of khaki uniforms as they walked briskly to work."

The British Embassy in Cairo enshrined the British way of life. At first, its grounds, like those of the other mansions reached to the Nile banks, but when the cornice was cut out in the '50s, it had to forgo "the bottom part of [its] lawn which spread from the terrace down to a low wall at the very edge of the Nile." The embassy itself remained unchanged, though: "an ample colonial house, protected from the sun by a wide columned verandah, on two storeys and guarded by wrought-iron railings adorned with the cipher of Queen Victoria. The portico flanked by stone lions and a short flight of stairs led up to the house."

The interior of the Embassy reflected the same British imperial taste for pomp and circumstance. "In Sir Lempson's day, its lofty rooms hung in silk damask pro-

vided an impressive setting for the antiques chests and chairs he had brought back from China, and his collection of Persian rugs."

Haute society

Many families belonging to the *haute Juive* — the Jewish establishment — like the Cattauis, Menascos, Rollos and Harraris, the financiers of Egypt, elected to live in Garden City. So did the Egyptian aristocracy: "Westwards towards the Nile lay the parliament buildings ringed by a constellation of ministries" (most buildings courtesy of Khedive Ismail), "and between them and the river was a fashionable quarter which took its name from the Midan Kasr El-Doubara."

"There the richest Egyptians and members of the royal family lived in large imposing mansions, while just to the south lay the winding, tree-lined streets of Garden City. Here the houses were just as substantial but closer together, and interspersed with office and apartment blocks. Although both British and Egyptian families lived in Garden City, it was mainly favoured by Egyptians, who liked its proximity to the centre of town."

Life during those years was filled with excitement and Cairene society never seemed to tire of receptions and parties. Political enemies seemed to have no problem socialising together and often frequented the same groups and patronised the same establishments. Garden City had its fair share of fun and contradictions: "Prince Abbas Halim had fought for the Germans in the First War, admired the ideology of National Socialism and in-

involved himself in trade unions. The British did not approve of his pro-German sympathies, for which he was interned in 1942, but in the meantime they enjoyed going to the parties he gave with his wife Tahia Halim in Garden City. Ironically one of Abbas Halim's palaces, at 6 Sharia Rustum, acted as the American Legation in Cairo," writes Cooper.

In the summer of 1941 the first Minister of State in the Middle East, Oliver Lyttelton, arrived in Egypt and — "moved into an office at No 10 Sharia Tolumbat in Garden City, which inevitably became known as 'No 10'." The house, unchanged from the outside, is now tenanted with a foreign agency occupying the top floor. The old fashioned elevator rises sedately to apartments which have conserved vestiges of the elaborate taste of its original owner.

With the end of the war, Garden City saw the withdrawal of the British troops but little changed for the inhabitants of Garden City. It remained home to members of the Jewish and Syro-Lebanese elite. For almost ten more years they continued to lead an opulent life, tending their gardens and entertaining their friends.

Twilight of gentility

In the mid-fifties, the Levy-Garboua villa stood opposite Nabhas Pasha's residence, a testimony to the efficiency with which Madame Levy-Garboua ran her domain. Petite, she simply made up in authority for what she lacked in size. Every Sunday she entertained her granddaughters and their

friends for lunch, presiding at the head of the table which shone with crystal and silverware. A gentle breeze came through the French windows, mixing the perfume of the flowers in the garden with the delicate fragrance of the sauces.

Madame Levy-Garboua invariably oriented the conversation towards cultural topics. She was well-travelled and enjoyed concerts and the theatre. The only sign that this was a traditional Jewish household could be detected by the observer spotting the Mezza (a small metal tube pierced by a small opening where a piece of paper on which a rabbi had written the sacred numbers was placed) affixed to one side of the entrance and which Jewish visitors kissed or touched reverently.

In every other way the Levy-Garbouas' way of life resembled that of their neighbours, the Sednaouis, Baharis, or Garbours, who were Christians, or of any Muslim family who lived in the environs. Their children went to the same schools, then congregated in the little public garden which has remained unchanged to this day.

Today the Levy-Garboua villa is in ruins, its roof tiles plundered, its windows gaping, its parquet floor sagging. Some legal dispute is being sorted out and has been for years, while the once elegant mansion which could have compared with the best hotel particulier in Neuilly, awaits the coup de grace which will send some developer scurrying to build a hideous tower, further disfiguring Garden City.

The small garden, the favourite playground of several generations of Garden City children as well as that of the Holt boys in Noel Barber's *A Woman of Cairo*, remains unchanged, as does the Pensionnat de la Mère de Dieu, a religious school for girls in which the offspring of many members of the Egyptian elite received their education, as did the children of the aristocracy not so long ago. Invited to Egypt by Khedive Tawfik, the nuns first set foot in Alexandria in 1880. Together with their Mother Superior, Mère Marie de Sainte Claire, they started their first school in Bulaq. In 1921, well-established and frequented by a large number of students from highly respected Egyptian families, the pensionnat opened in Garden City. Today, with 1200 students, the premises have become insufficient and an annex for the primary school is being built.

Banks and bulldozers

In the '90s, however, a visitor from the past would not recognise Garden City. Did the change start in the latter part of the fifties, when Abdel-Latif Boghdadi, the minister of municipal affairs, signed the decree ordering the beginning of works on the cornice? Or was it the departure of the British, foreign and pseudo-foreign residents, also during the fifties? Insurance companies took over the management of all the sequestered buildings and villas while some owners leaving the country for ever were content to sell for

much less than market value.

But in the final analysis those who bought or rented property in Garden City and Qasr El-Dubara during the fifties and sixties did so because they particularly liked the quiet opulence of the area and had no desire to change its character. Actress Nadia Lutfi is one of those. She moved to Garden City in the fifties and still remembers the streets being flooded and water pouring into ground floor apartments before the Aswan Dam was built. She loved the area for its suburban tranquillity and its tree-lined streets, where she could enjoy walking her dog. Lutfi is considered to be the "mayor of Garden City", having known most of its inhabitants.

"My tenants have been living in this building for over thirty years," says Abdel-Meguid Hussein El-Orabi, an agricultural engineer who inherited a tenanted building from his father. "Their parents lived here and were my parents' friends we are like a family." But Orabi confesses that with the low rents he cannot afford to maintain the building. "The problem with these older buildings is that, on the one hand, the land is worth millions, and on the other, the owners collect a ridiculously low rent. Not only do they have no money for repairs, but their dearest wish is probably to see the house being knocked down by some act of God since they cannot get rid of their tenants for generations to come."

Orabi would like to see tenants of old buildings taking charge of the maintenance. "Any one of them can afford to pay the few pounds that it would take to keep the buildings in order," he says.

Architect Mohamed El-Ayyoubi is of the same opinion. With three tenants he attends to the maintenance of the building in which he occupies an apartment. "Garden City's face changed completely the day the first investment bank moved here," says Khaled El-Ayyoubi, who works with his father. "Until banks and big business moved in, it kept its character. Now owners are falling over each other to sell or rent to foreign companies. The streets are choked. Some people arrive before seven in the morning to park their car. This was never meant to be a business district. Whenever a villa is pulled down, a huge tower takes its place. There is just not enough space."

Many questions remain. What should villa owners who can no longer afford to keep their property in good repair do? With a shortage of experienced servants and the high wages they command, how can a house owner operate a ten or fifteen room-cum-garden affair? How can he/she resist the temptation of selling for a price that will be a guarantee of affluence for years to come? How can developers be prevented from pouncing on a priceless piece of real estate and then rising sky-high?

"There are answers," says Ann Radwan, head of the Fulbright Commission in Egypt. A model could be found in the restored residential quarters which now house the commission's offices.



Ann Mohamed a *hawrah* in El-Salamiek Street has seen people come and go. Like many other *hawrahs* he remembers the way it used to be



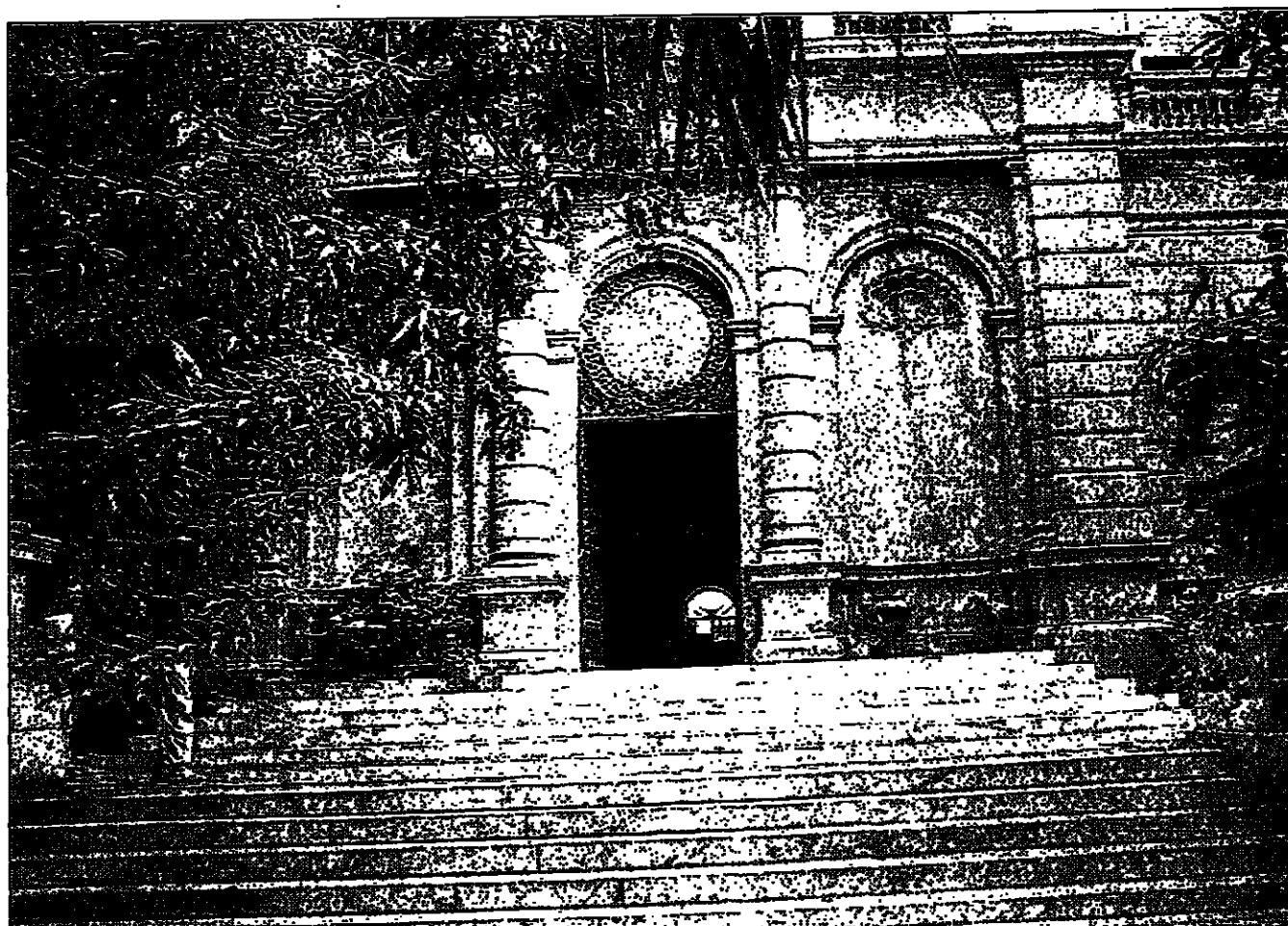
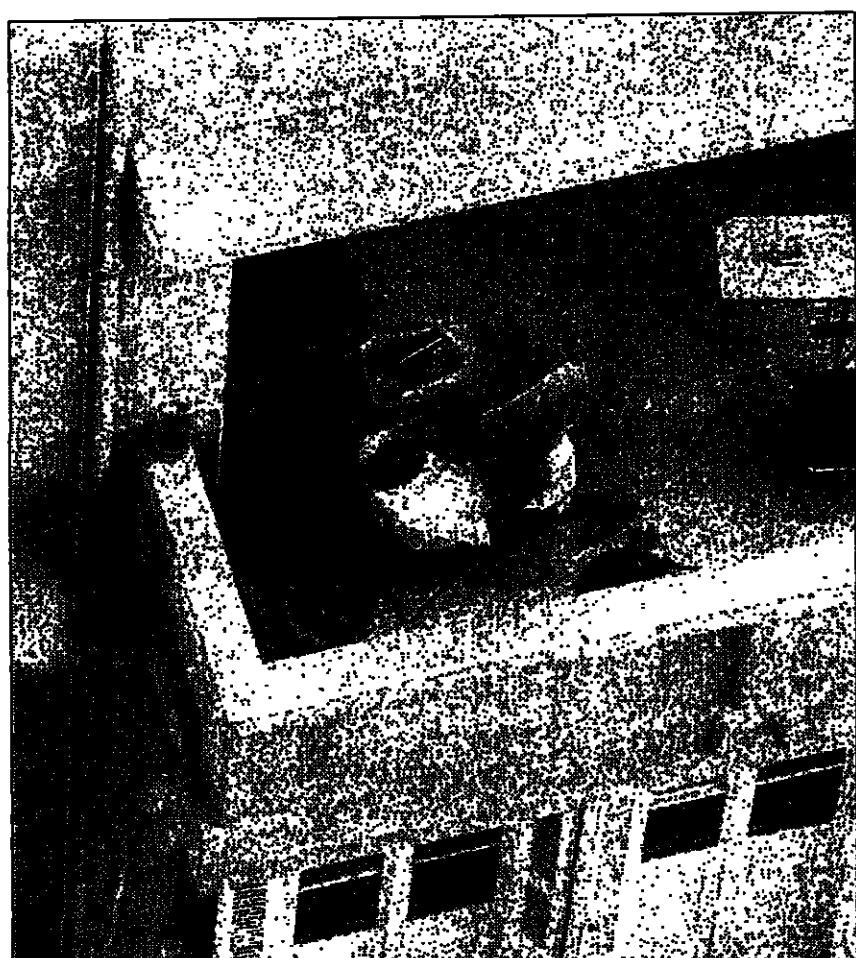
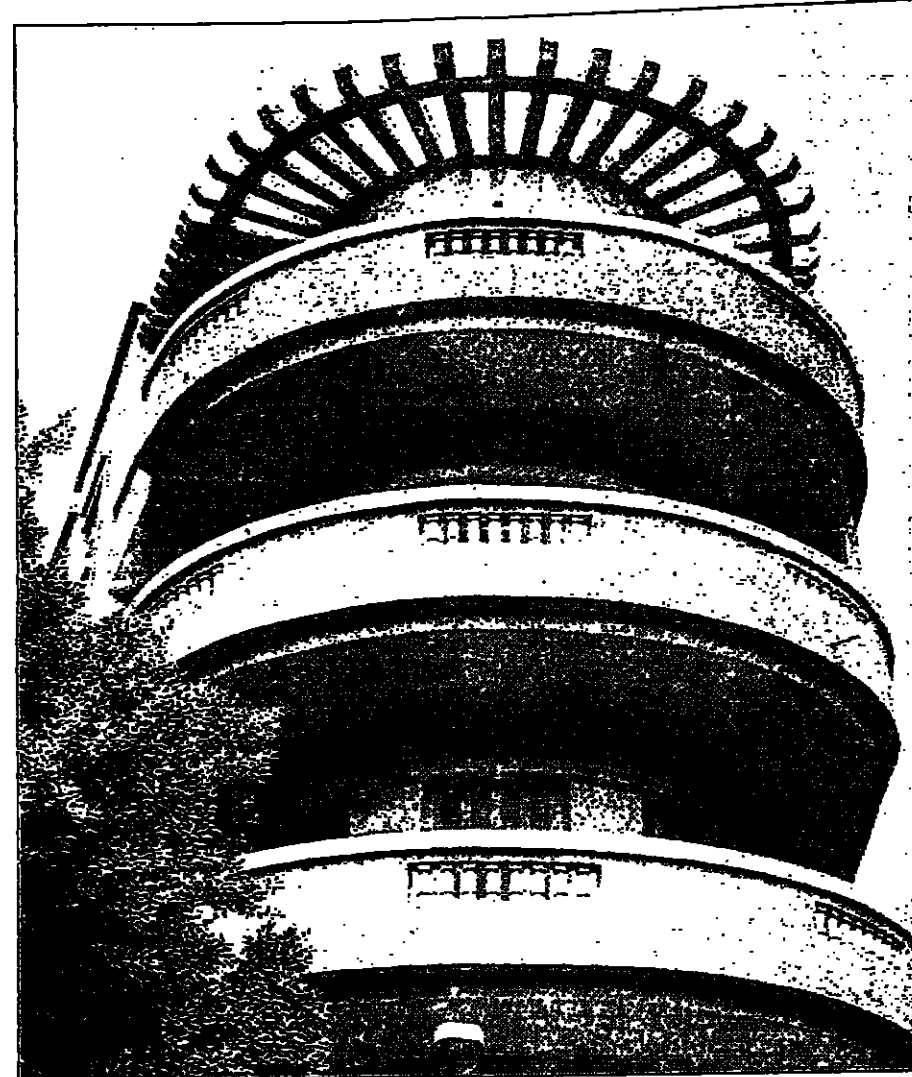
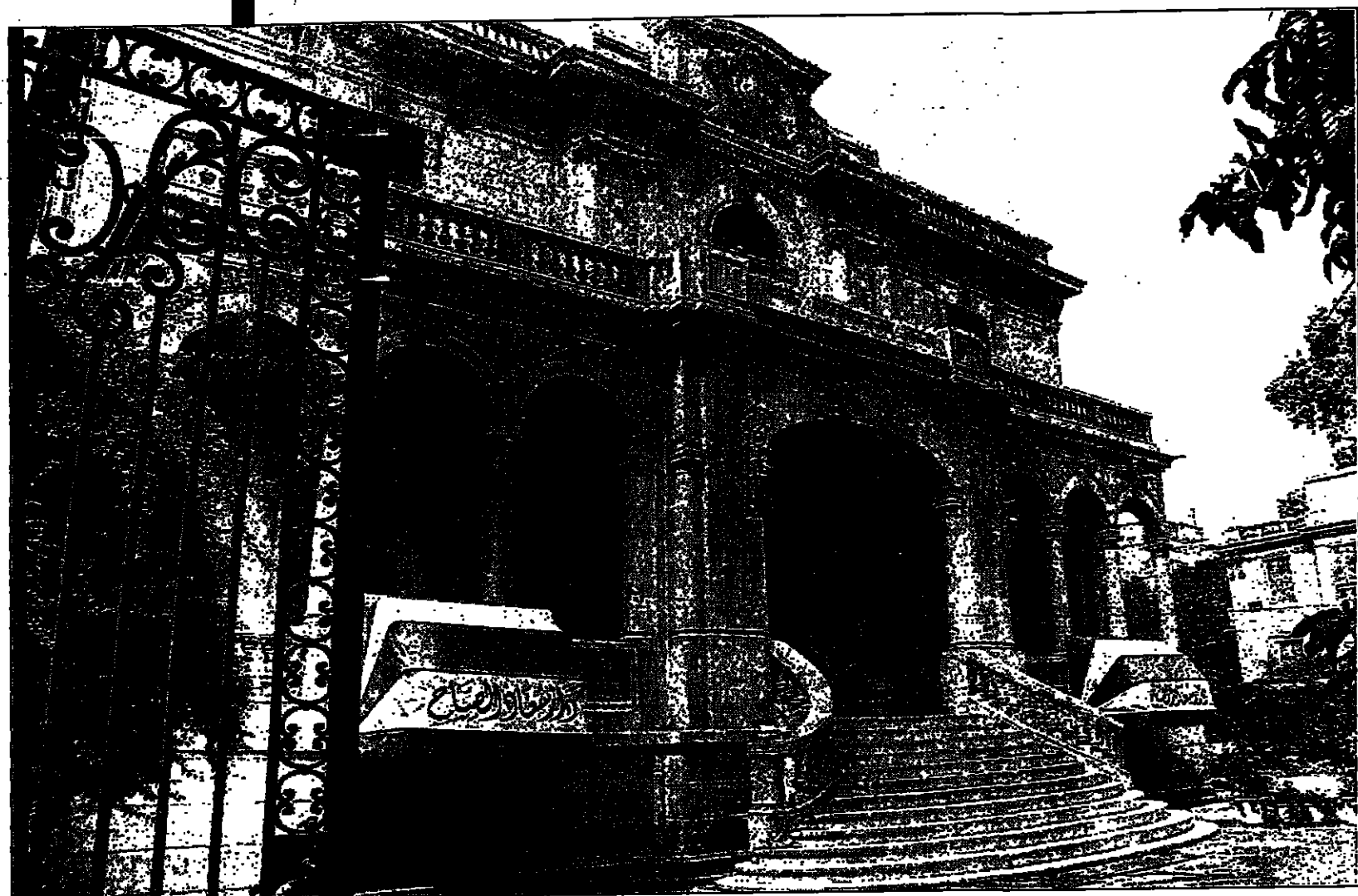
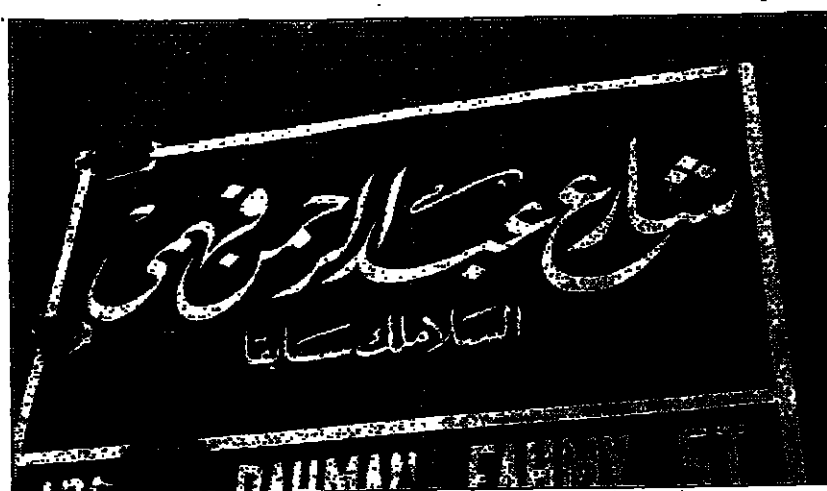
Ahmed Attia owned the first small kiosk in Garden City. In keeping with the times he has now become an important shopowner



Adel Sabet is one of the original inhabitants of Qasr El-Dubara. He watches the change around him with equanimity but hangs on staunchly to the past. He has brought little alterations to the interior of his villa which echoes the splendour of times gone by

A page from the past

IN THE fifties rare plants and manicured lawns graced the garden of the Levy-Garboua residence. A legal dispute between the original owners and the government has taken a long time to settle. The owners may have won the case in court but what are they really getting? They will be compensated in the general view on the matter. But who will want to repair the damage to the house? Standing in a pile of rubbish, having lost its dignity, it is gaping from all its apertures, no longer fit for anyone to live in. The parquets have caved in and the tiles on the roof have disappeared. The empty shell barely stands, a testimony to man's vandalistic instincts. The land however is worth a fortune and when another tower will raise its head in place of the gracious home, passers-by will never know that in its place stood a charming villa, and that the breeze coming in from its tastefully curtained window once smelled so sweet.



Clockwise from top left:

As residential villas are replaced by office

replaced by office buildings the names of the streets change, clarifying

streets change, glorifying
heroes of the new age. But
the old names linger and

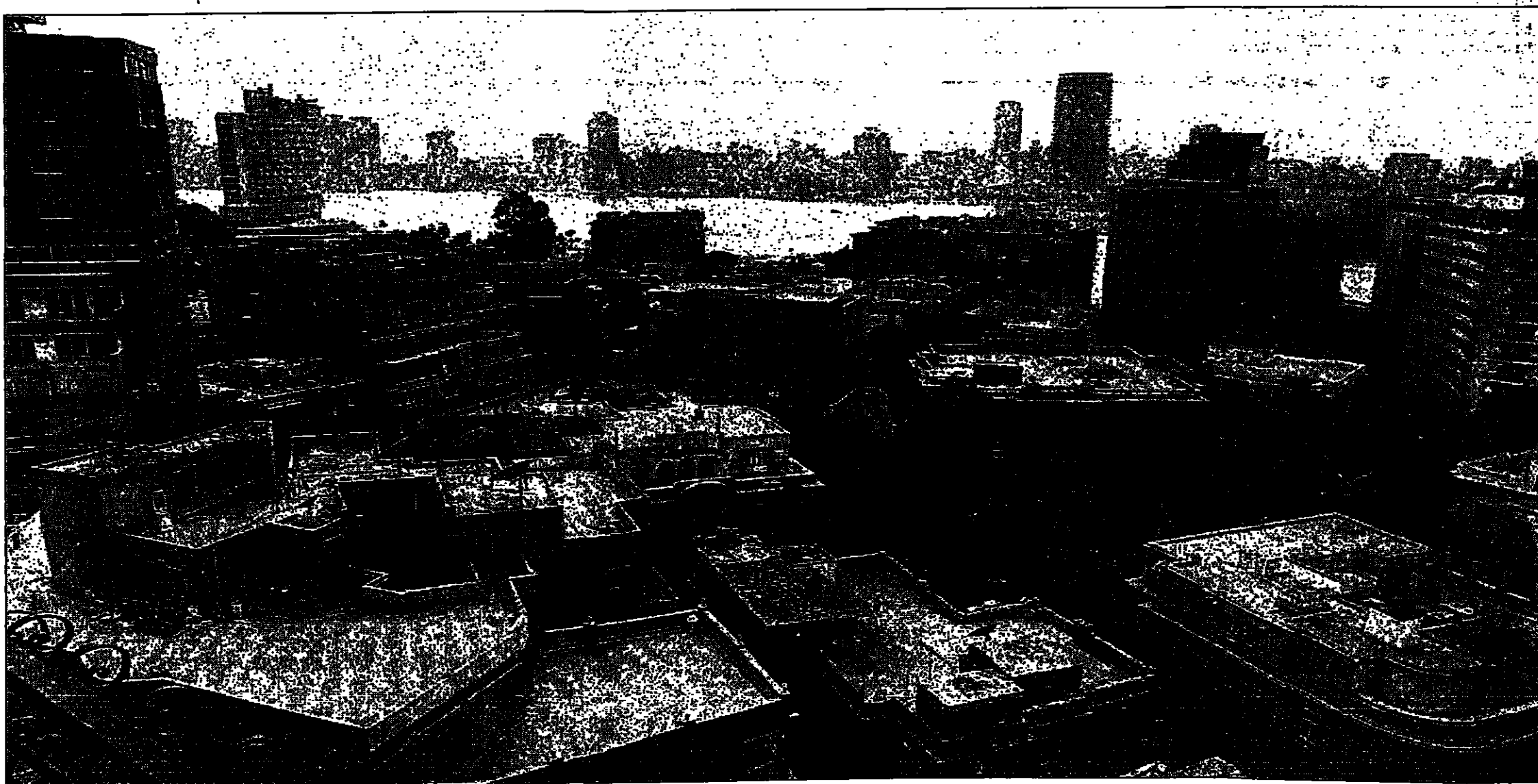
the old names linger and
the *Pensionnat de la Mère*

de Dieu will remain for ever in Salamlek Street;

- History is being tentatively erased in

Garden City albeit imperfectly. Here and there

a testimony of the past
remains which so far has



مَكْنَزٌ مِنَ الْأَصْلِ

Beneath the sequins

"A Trade Like Any Other," Female Singers and Dancers in Egypt, Karin van Nieuwkerk. Cairo: AUC Press, 1996

A Trade Like Any Other is subtitled "Female Singers and Dancers in Egypt" and carries on its cover a picture — the details come from the back of the book — of "Ghawazi, or dancing girls" from an 1848 album by E. Frise. It is rather a nice picture, though a little misleading, given that the bulk of the text concentrates on contemporary entertainers rather than on the historical status of dancers. Still, there is an introductory section dealing with the socio-economic conditions of entertainers in the 18th, and more particularly, the 19th century, which, in its analysis of the changes in the status of singers and dancers over the period is weighted perhaps a little too heavily towards the accounts of European travellers.

The author, Karin van Nieuwkerk, accepts fairly uncritically the distinctions between entertainers made by Chabrol and Villoteau, who toured the country in the early 1820s, and who followed the lead of Savary in characterising the *awalin*.

Savary is himself quoted: "They are called savantes. A more painstaking education than other women has earned them this name. They form a celebrated community within the country. In order to join, one must have a beautiful voice, a good possession of the language, a knowledge of the rules of poetry and an ability to spontaneously compose and sing couplets adapted to the circumstances. There is no fête

without them; no festival where they do not provide the ornamentation." From this auspicious beginning, which could have been examined in a little more depth, and a little more critically, van Nieuwkerk plots the descent from celebration to notoriety, before her study begins to pick up interest with a series of interviews conducted with contemporary dancers, and the generation of female entertainers that immediately preceded them.

Here, at least, there is the advantage of unmediated, first-hand accounts of what it is like to actually perform to day, both at weddings and on the *mouid* circuit, and in nightclubs. And while the author is aware of the discrepancies and anomalies between the image projected by the performers during their interviews and the realities they face day to day, she interposes discreetly, and has the good manners to allow the performers to get on with their own stories.

The problem, of course, with a book of this type is that, despite the acknowledgement to those who assisted in the rewriting of her thesis in the preface, it remains just that — a piece of research, on an interesting topic admittedly — but a book the promise of whose cover is belied by the text. Not that it sinks beneath the weight of its methodological apparatus, which even to a non-specialist seems at times surprisingly flimsy. It is just that there is a

very interesting series of stories to be told, at which the author continuously hints but which she never really explores.

And so the reader is left with a number of tantalising tidbits, many of which, thankfully, are referenced. In discussing the dancer as the stereotypical, *bête noire* of the respectable middle classes she alludes, for instance, to two articles published in *Rose El-Youssef* during 1936 and 1937.

"In the 1930s," writes van Nieuwkerk, "there was a famous case of an employee of the *wagf* ministry who embezzled enormous sums of money to please his favourite dancer. In the same period, a son of a pasha stole money from his grandparents to maintain a dancer."

This study is at its best, though, when it discusses the cultural meanings that have accrued to the actual bodies of women, which are, after all, the stock in trade of the dancers. "They [the dancers] profit from the cultural construction of the female body as seductive but pay for it in terms of status and respect." Which leads neatly back to the confusions and gambits the performers themselves voice in their interviews to underline their own respectability, and to insist that dancing is, indeed, "a trade like any other."

Reviewed by Nigel Ryan



Plain Talk

I have just returned from a visit to London, one that has swept me off my intellectual feet, as it were. During my stay there as a guest of the British Council, I got a privileged glimpse into the current state of the arts in Britain: from children's literature to the theatre and the opera.

There was, however, one cultural issue that made me feel perfectly at home: I mean the eternal debate between the old and the new, the established and the experimental — so reminiscent of what we in Egypt prefer to call the modernity versus tradition debate. The minister of heritage, Mrs Bottomley, for one, seems to know where she stands — firmly on the side of experimentation. In a recent speech, she announced the commissioning of a substantial fund, drawn from the lottery, to support up and coming artists.

On National Poetry Day, celebrated on 10 October, the BBC devoted long hours to listeners to choose their favourite poems, thus attempting to bring poetry down from the rarefied climes it traditionally inhabits. The celebrations this year coincided with the publication of a report entitled *A Poetry Survey for the Arts Council of England: Key Findings*.

The report is startlingly reassuring about the status of poetry in Britain today. Its claim that the past few years have witnessed a resurgence of interest in poetry is endorsed by data gathered from the poetry book market. Trade research showed that there was a 154 percent increase in the number of poetry titles published since 1975. Furthermore, in 1994, 1,797 poetry titles were published — a 26 percent increase on the 1993 output.

Rather sceptically, Sean O'Brien writes in *The Guardian* that this would indicate that there are more poets than readers. To him, there is a vast "and almost unmapped experimental wing occupied by poets so serious and subversive that being read or listened to is the least of their problems". But he comes down hard on these poets, describing their poetry as "neither speak[ing] for England nor aspir[ing] to: most of the best poets writing in English aren't English anyway and would also resist being called British."

But the report also tackles the different definitions of poetry. The definition provided by *The Oxford English Dictionary* is deemed inadequate: "[poetry is] the expression of beautiful or elevated thought, imagination or feeling, in appropriate language, such language containing a rhythmical element and having usually a metrical form."

To this, the report retorts: "Poetry is a house of many rooms" — a conception that spans songs, lyrics, greeting card verses, limericks as well as more traditional forms like sonnets and ballads. Nevertheless, some of the sample interviewees found much of modern poetry inaccessible, others claiming that while thousands of books are being published, very few are read, fewer still actually bought. Yet, the report also registers the increase in the number of poetry readings and the rise in attendance at such events. By and large, the evidence provided in this report spells a rosy future for poetry.

Mursi Saad El-Din

No bridges left to sigh

Bridges Destroyed, Mediterraneans 7, ed Kenneth Brown and Hannah Davis Taieb, Paris, 1995

"I've lost all but life, that is mine and I alone am bound to use all of it... nobody should expect any material gain from these words... I think that my children may be happy to hear from me, and perhaps some other caring soul will be glad."

Two days later the old man who spoke these words was dead. His children had not been located. His final words, witness to one more tragedy among the multitude that comprise life in former Yugoslavia, were recorded by Lazar Stojanovic, a physician working at an outpatient clinic attached to a refugee camp. They are published in *Bridges Destroyed*, the 7th edition of the bi-annual review *Mediterraneans*, containing writings from across the Balkans, from Bosnia, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Serbia, and Slovenia.

There is no single narrative voice to guide you through the minefields for unlike other books on the Balkans *Bridges Destroyed* reflects an extreme volatility. The reader can pick and choose from a menu of literary texts, poems, folk songs, personal testimonies, and even a play, from the words of — to name a few — a Bosnian driver working on the border, a Muslim mother besieged in Sarajevo, a former Serbian leader who fought against Serbian nationalism, a visiting journalist, an artist and a poet.

Yet despite the plethora of first-hand accounts, inevitably new and harrowing, *Bridges Destroyed* is far from being a sensationalised plea for pity. There is an absence of nostalgia for the past. Nor is there any attempt to gloss over the future implications of a past war. A multiculturalism shattered beneath the weight of factionalism, bigotry and xenophobia haunts the reader throughout the introductory dossier on Mostar.

"When you spend the night in Mostar, it is not the sound that wakes you up in the morning, it is the light... I could never get enough of that light, even though I counted it everywhere," wrote Ivo Andric, winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1960. Andric, whose "artistry is Bosnian, his name Croat", but who considered himself a Serbian writer, died in 1975, more than two decades before Kenneth Brown was to write "A Mostar Without Bridges, Without Light".

Brown laments the destruction of Mostar's famous bridges, particularly "the Old Bridge... a 16th century Ottoman masterpiece of engineering", destroyed by Cro-

atian forces between May 1993 and February 1994.

For Brown and the inhabitants of Mostar, whose accounts he records, the bridges epitomised the connecting ties that bound an intensely diverse community together. "Can you imagine, they've killed the Old Bridge," said one shopkeeper to Brown. Urbicide is what it was, concludes the author. "It's a war between reason and madness," says Alija Kebu, a 63 year-old poet, lamenting the intolerable claustrophobia that is partitioned Mostar.

A suffocating confinement of life, containment of the mind and soul is the message lurking behind much of the material presented by Brown, Bogdan Bogdanovic, and Predrag Matvejevic. Bogdanovic was the mayor of Belgrade from 1982 until 1986. When war broke out he was denounced as "an enemy of the nation" by the Serbs on account of his dissidence.

Now a resident in Vienna, his article "One Thousand Days" is a grim reflection on the lack of Serbian voices raised against the siege of Sarajevo. The silence with which many Serbs responded to the siege was not only shameful but makes them accomplices to the crime contends Bogdanovic. "Guilty and accomplices are equally the professors of architecture, urbanism, sociology, history and philosophy who, while being victims of a mental and moral block, did not realise that the siege of Sarajevo had a higher symbolic significance," he declares, alluding to the absence of voices raised to denounce the siege of Sarajevo.

The lives of ordinary people under the 1,001 days of siege are recounted by Predrag Matvejevic, who was born in Mostar but who spent his student years in Sarajevo. Dwindling morale echoes in one anecdote when he visits a family with medicines he had brought from Paris, but they ask him for anti-depressants instead. Matvejevic offers the reader no consolation. "I was cold down to my bones, and sorrowful down to my soul. I can see no solution to offer the reader."

Neither can a father on the 659th day of the siege offer any relief. Three months before he had sold everything, including the children's toys, to buy some hens to put food on the table. But now it is winter and the hens do not lay eggs because it is too cold. "They get frightened by all these bombardments. If this continues, I fear they will no longer lay eggs. I have put all my hope in the hens. What can we do? We have no choice."



Mostar, 1995

His account is one of a series given at different points of the siege. It is, however, "Le Testament Barbare" that the reader is likely to find the most uncompromising of all the assembled accounts. It is not a personal account per se, though it does include such extracts. In "Le Testament Barbare", Stanko Cerovic, a writer and literary critic from Monte Negro, reviews the international community's, and particularly the international media's, reaction to reports of rape in Bosnia.

"Nearly everything is forgiven by the press except the unchanging refrain about raped women being murdered, destroyed emotionally, left without hope of salvation," he charged. And with good reason: rape, must be dealt with by dehumanising the events not sensationalising them.

"Let's not exaggerate, we are still alive," said one woman.

Cerovic's "Le Testament Barbare" is not only about rape in Bosnia, it is an assessment of the relationship between fascism, chauvinism, nationalism and sexual oppression. "Historically, fascist ideologies are ac-

companied by sexual crimes," notes Cerovic, who highlights the exploitation of rape for political motives and its use as a universal weapon of aggression aimed at inciting popular hatred against the perceived enemy. And in the end the reader is left overwhelmed, especially by the intensity of the passages and photos.

While it may appear somewhat disjointed on the surface, the collection of texts assembled in *Bridges Destroyed* successfully avoids what much literary material on Bosnia does not: it offers no petty morale on the evilness of war, the stupidity of men and the goodness of peace. It makes claims to neither objectivity nor authority — the reader is free to interpret, envision and empathise with the multitude of opinions and personal experiences. Kenneth Brown and Hannah Davis Taieb have certainly kept the promise made in the introduction: "None of them (the texts) will leave you indifferent".

Reviewed by Mariz Tadros

Personal papers and secret sects

Mahmoud El-Wardani reviews the more interesting Arabic titles to have appeared in the last month

• *Gamal Himdan: Safahat Min Awariqhi Al-Khasa* (Gamal Himdan: Pages from his Private Papers). Gamal Himdan, ed Abdel-Hamid Saleh Himdan. Cairo: Dar El-Ghad, 1996.

An encyclopaedic scholar, Gamal Himdan resigned from his university post in 1969 to live in complete solitude, producing such landmark books as *Shakhsyat Masr* (Egypt's Character). After his death, his brother Abdel-Hamid Saleh Himdan pored over his private papers, eventually compiling them into the present volume. It is divided into five chapters under the headings: "Egypt and the Egyptians", "Geography and Geographical", "The Arabs and the Arab World", "Islam and the Islamic World" and "The Western World". The significance of the book derives in part from the fact that these papers were not written for publication but were notes jotted down by Himdan while writing his published works — hence the freshness and revolutionary directness of this volume.

• *Rasmi Al-Ikhwan Al-Safa* (The Treatises of Ikhwan Al-Safa), Vol. I. Cairo: Cultural Palaces Organisation, Al-Zakhrat Series, 1996.

The movement of Ikhwan Al-Safa began in the fourth century AH, or the eleventh century AD in Basra, Iraq. The movement is cloaked in mystery and even those members of the group whose names have come down to us remain shadowy. But as some

Orientalist scholars have observed, the notions propagated and ideas espoused by Ikhwan Al-Safa have influenced many other sects and groups in the Muslim world, including the Ismailis, the Imdadiah and the Druze. It was, moreover, via Ikhwan Al-Safa that Greek philosophy made inroads into Islamic thought.

While members of Ikhwan Al-Safa observed a certain secrecy in their meetings, they depended on treatises to publicise their thought. The 52 extant treatises cover such disparate subjects as pedagogy, mathematics and biology. The volume in hand publishes the first 14 of the treatises, including those on music, geography and astronomy.

• *A'malat Al-Gharib* (Fables of Dust), Elias Farkouh. Amman: Dar Az-Zinab, Li-Nashr Wal-Tawzi'e, 1996.

This is the second novel by the Jordanian writer and translator Elias Farkouh. On the jacket, Egyptian novelist and critic Edward El-Kharat writes: "The pillars of dust that rise... appear as if coming from a world beyond the real, a world of a gigantic, endless dust cloud. Dust is associated with death, with murder, with nothingness, with betrayal. This is dust that comes from another world, a world of ciphers and complex significations, a world I would call 'the thorn of meanings'."

• *Hikayat Al-Gharib* (Tales of the Stranger), Youssef Fakhouri. Cairo:

Cultural Palaces Organisation, 1996. This, the first collection of short stories by Youssef Fakhouri, is promising in its technical experimentation and its thematic rigor.

• *Wazan Li-Shahab* (A Homeland for Youth), Mohamed Seif. Cairo: Cultural Palaces Organisation, Aswat Series, 1996.

A gap of two decades separates Mohamed Seif's first poetry collection from this, his second. This collection brings 20 new poems written in the '80s and '90s between Sophia, Paris and Cairo.

• *Al-Hasilla Al-Lughawiya: Ahamiyatha wa Masadirha wa Wasa'il Tammayyitha* (The Linguistic Heritage: Its Importance, Its Sources and Methods of Developing It), Ahmed Mohamed El-Ma'toug, Kuwait: The National Council for Culture, Arts and Literature, 1996.

A study of the issue of linguistic, lexical heritage taking the Arabic language as a case study, gauging the subject through various aspects: linguistic, cultural, psychological and pedagogical. The book also



Gamal Himdan

discusses methods whereby the linguistic heritage of the Arabic speaker can be enhanced.

• *Al-'Ard Al-Masrahi Bayn Al-Kalima Wal-Lughat* (Theatrical Performances Between the Word and Language), Hamada Ibrahim. Cairo: Cultural Palaces Organisation, 1996.

This volume attempts to redress the dearth of semiotic studies of the theatre in the Arabic library. The author casts his net wide in search of the semiotics of theatre, turning his attention equally to the use of verbal language and the body language employed in, for example, pantomime, as well as to such staple dimensions as decor.

• *Hawamish Al-Fath Al-Arabi: Hikayat Al-Dikhoul* (Footnotes of the Arab Conquest: Tales of Conquest), Sanaa El-Masri. Cairo: Dar Sina Li-Nashr, 1996.

In her most recent study Sanaa El-Masri displays her characteristic courage in tackling thorny issues and taboo areas in the region where the religious and the political converge, where the historical and the mythical merge, where fact and fig-

ments are indistinguishable. The tales she tackles span the period from immediately before the Arab conquest of Egypt to the Abbasid era. In her introduction, the author avows her intention to provide a reading of all the alternative narratives silenced by the official narrative of the conqueror.

The first of the three chapters rereads the story of Maria Al-Qibtiyya (Mary the Copt) who was given by the ruler of Egypt as a slave girl to the Prophet Mohamed. The second chapter provides a close analysis of the details and minutiae of the Arab conquest of Egypt. As to the last chapter, it delineates the history of the Copts, the conditions that governed their daily lives in the period in question and their persecution under the Arabs. Throughout, the author maintains a salutary skepticism about the many contemporary sources into which she delved.

• *Al-Adab Wal-Dalala* (Literature et Signification), Trvetetan Todrov, tr Mohamed Nadiem. Syria: Masrak Al-Ikmas Al-Hadasi, 1996.

The text in hand is based on Trvetetan Todrov's 1966 PhD thesis, supervised by Roland Barthes. As an early work by one of this century's most prominent critics, this book reveals the germs of Todrov's subsequent work.

• *Hittat Baidou* (White Walls), Atef

Abdel-Aziz. Cairo: Cultural Palaces Organisation, Ibdast Series, 1996.

This, the first volume of poetry by Atef Abdel-Aziz, is divided into three sections: Apprehensions of the Paint Brush; A Last, Last Winter; States of Being.

• *Malik Al-Yahoud* (King of the Jews), Youssef Fadil. Casa Blanca: Manshurat Al-Rabita, 1996.

The most recent novel by Moroccan writer Youssef Fadil is set in Marrakesh during the last days of French occupation and the beginning of the Moroccan resistance movement. The novelist's accomplishment in drawing mood and controlling tempo is evident in the charged ambience he delineates.

• *Hawiyat Masr* (The Vitality of Egypt), Samir Gharib. Cairo: Mak-

Unhomely homes

As the world celebrated Habitat Day last week, Mariz Tadros takes a look at Egypt's unplanned housing areas



Of men and pickles

I belong to the old generation, the one which thought that men and women were complementary and that a woman without a man missed out on the better things in life. My father, considered by all and sundry an enlightened man, and, if not completely Westernised, at least very much *au fait* with matters Western, drew the line at male/female relationships. He firmly directed me towards non-competitive studies and advised me against wisecracks which might have let on that I was not retarded.

Prospective husbands apparently were not willing to enter the all-important life-long partnership with "blue-stockings" — the term, unmistakably pejorative, which he applied to female intellectuals, pronouncing it with a grimace of disdain. I should, he often told me, develop the more feminine side of my character and assiduously practice wholehearted admiration for masculine achievements.

For a while, I really tried. I wore stiletto heels that seriously endangered my spinal health, teased my hair into hazardous do's, and applied lipstick so blood-red I often appeared to be out for a dusk-till-dawn vampire fest. The complementary expression, which I remembered to wear whenever I happened to glimpse a mirror, was one of faint surprise — as if I was unsure of my name. My sisters and I practiced phrases which we considered artless and naive. "How do you use a sugar-bowl?" was an especial favourite.

The man I chose, however, claimed to have chosen me for my brains. What he really meant was that I had enough brains to start his fan club. I am sad to say that I probably remained the only faithful member during all our years of marriage.

By and large, however, I can say today that my marriage was generally a happy one. Less happy was the time which immediately followed my husband's death.

I had been a wonderful follower — a sort of gofer. He ruled, I obeyed. He spoke, I listened. He told me what to do and I did it. When it worked, I gave him credit, when it didn't, he blamed me. We considered it a fair division of responsibilities. Suddenly, however, I had no one to tell me when to buy expensive cheese, when to get petrol and when to fire the maid. I was lost. And angry. Why wasn't anyone stepping forward to take charge of my life?

Well, the truth is that no one volunteered and I was forced to become a person, having spent over twenty happy years as an appendage I started with little things, like eating when I felt hungry or buying Camembert instead of feta cheese. I spent several nights reading and watching TV and went to sleep at dawn. I felt guilty — ours had been a family excessively given to routine — but soon the guilt faded. I started realising that I could do a number of things all by myself without extensive consultation. Why, I was managing my affairs and, if I made mistakes, I just paid for them — and promptly forgot about them.

I was having a great time, really. I was in the driver's seat, having no more or less accidents than anybody else I knew (although I did forget to change gears sometimes). Still, it took me a long time to draw the obvious conclusion. After all, a popular proverb says that it is better to be sheltered in the shadow of a man than in the shadow of the wall. Was I going to disprove this bit of folklore, tested by time and thousands of well-protected women?

Why were women so keen on tying themselves down if men were not a useful addition to their lives? I panicked. I was missing something. I started counting the instances when it would have been nice to have a man around. Changing light bulbs? I could do it myself, and besides, the electrician down the road was quite helpful. During a trip perhaps? I took one and did very well on my own, losing neither money nor passport.

Finally, during my recent trip to the States I thought I had discovered a legitimate reason why one should keep a man around the house. My daughter went away on business and left her children in my care. At dinner time they asked for pickles with their hamburgers. There was a brand new jar in the refrigerator. "Can you open it please, grandma," asked my granddaughter, handing me the jar. I grasped it firmly and twisted the lid masterfully in what I thought was the right direction. Try as I may, the lid would not yield. "When is your father coming home?" I gasped, fearing a hernia. "He is out of town," mumbled the little girl vaguely.

"The pickles, grandma," I gave it one last desperate try. "Look, children," I said firmly, "there are things that a woman cannot do. This jar can only be opened by a man, when your father comes home we will all have pickles." The children gave me a sceptical look. "Then we'll have to wait till next week," my grandson protested mildly. Soon, however, they gave up trying to convince me to give it another go and settled down, diligently munching on their pickle-less hamburgers. I tried to ally my guilt, but the sight of them puckering their little lips sadly around the dry buns wrenched my heart.

The next day, I had forgotten about the pickle debacle. My daughter, however, returned from her business trip and heard all about it. She waved the jar of pickles at me, laughing. "I hear that only men eat pickles in your neck of the woods," she said. "Not in my neck of the woods," I said. "Our pickles don't come in child-proof, airtight sealed jars." "Look," said my daughter, trying not to look pre-emptively triumphant. After all, she was about to demonstrate the technological superiority of American pickle packing — and her ability to cope with it. She rapped smartly on the bottom of the jar, producing a popping sound. The lid came off effortlessly. "You needn't have a man around for the rest of your life, and you can still eat pickles. The label tells you how to use them — unlike men. You can't do wrong." The pickles were delicious.

Fayza Hassan

Watch your step. The sewage runoff has almost invaded the rough, narrow streets. Even the fumes of the burning garbage cannot smother the stench of sewage. Haphazardly laid sewage pipelines get clogged while the slum inhabitants fight to prevent the water from getting into their one-room family homes. On the other hand, had the water been clean, the women would not have had to make the long trip to the water pumps. In these homes, the roof, if there is one, can be made of anything from planks of cheap wood, to tin sheets, cardboard, stacks of newspapers and palm tree fronds.

Welcome to one of Egypt's 1,000 unplanned housing areas. Twelve million Egyptians live in such areas, accounting for 20 per cent of the country's entire population. Egyptians, however, are not alone in this. According to UN estimates, there are at least 600 million urban dwellers around the world living in environments that threaten not only their health but also their lives. As was declared so eloquently at the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) in June, these people, many of whom happen to live below the poverty line, "cannot adequately provide for their basic needs in shelter, employment, water and health."

"We had three options," said Alaa Thabet, deputy minister of Local Administration and director of the national campaign to upgrade unplanned areas. He went on, "We could just let the inhabitants of the slum areas be, since they have already violated the law and we do not build infrastructure for those who have violated the law. We found this to be humanely, socially and politically unacceptable. The other option was to demolish haphazardly built areas and transfer the

people to newly-built housing. We found the costs enormous and we don't have the finances for it. The third option was to develop these areas by first setting up some infrastructure. This is what we decided to do."

On 1 May, 1993, President Hosni Mubarak asked that "there be an immediate implementation of a national programme in upgrading the most important services and facilities in haphazardly built areas in all governorates." A national five-year campaign was announced covering the period from 1993 to 1998, costing LE3.8 billion and covering 11 governorates including Cairo. The campaign targeted 527 zones, assessed as requiring emergency upgrading. "So far, we have managed to upgrade 127 zones fully at the cost of LE1.3 billion," declared Thabet.

Yet "fully upgrade" means providing water, sewerage, electricity, roads and trash collecting services. Excluded are other facilities such as schools or hospitals because they are the responsibility of separate ministries. Furthermore, since the Local Administration Ministry is not an enforcement body, it cannot force its national strategy on the governorates. It can only carry out surveys and offer advice to them.

The ministry cannot, for instance, stop governorates from bulldozing some randomly built areas, although "out of the 527 zones, there were 25 which we believed had to be demolished," admitted Thabet. "The conditions there were beyond improvement. If, say, we dug in the ground for sewerage installations, the place would have collapsed," he explained. But the people must be thanked for building their own housing, said Thabet. He added, "Yes, the people acted illegally, but they must be thanked. The state could not have managed to provide housing for all of them. So the people helped them-

selves. Otherwise, there would have been an explosion."

Perhaps it has already exploded, I suggested. "This is not true," protested Thabet, who cited new urban planning schemes designed to prevent the growth of more shanty areas as well as the increased emphasis on development in Upper Egypt to prevent the influx of rural migrants to Cairo. The latter policy has been largely successful, according to Thabet. "The rate of migration to urban areas has been reduced drastically. It reached its high point in the 1960s and 1970s and began to decrease in the 1980s and 1990s," he said.

Milad Hanna, a housing expert, disagrees. "The problem is anything but contained. The government has done too little, too late." The deregulated market economy created an economic jungle in which the lowest prices for the smallest housing units became beyond the means of the poor, he said. "The right to a place to live is a basic human right, not a privilege," asserted Hanna. An *Al-Ahram* article in the 9 September issue warned that by the year 2001, Egypt would need 3.4 million new housing units and another 4.3 million by the year 2010.

It is no wonder that sociologist Saadeddin Ibrahim wrote of the cramped and insalubrious slum areas that "their stuff [populations] is proving to be the most flammable materials in Arab-Muslim societies today. Its youth is an easy prey for manipulation by demagogues, organised criminals, agents provocateurs and Islamist militants."

A case in point mentioned by Ibrahim is the armed confrontation that took place between a militant Islamist group and the Egyptian authorities in December 1992. The western area of Mounira in Imbaba, a slum district west of Cairo, was then a hide-out for Islamists on the run. It lies less than three kilometres across the Nile from the upper class district of Zamalek. Despite this proximity, explained Ibrahim, western Mounira then had no schools, hospitals, sewage system, public transportation nor a police station within walking distance.

A slum area is not just a potential hide-out for extremists but a breeding ground for militancy, argued Azza Korayem, lecturer at the National Center for Sociological and Criminological Research in Cairo. "It is a fact that the government bore a grudge against the inhabitants of ran-

domly built areas because they were illegal settlers. They were punished by being denied basic services and so they have had to set up their own networks," she said.

In practical terms, this means having to connect a wire to an electric pole illegally, building sewage lines which have to be regularly cleared by private means and patching together shelter with the materials available. "But can you imagine what it is like for an entire family to sleep all in the same room, year in, year out? A young boy, for instance, sees what his parents are doing and decides to practice on his sister. Incest, sexual abuse and rape are very much prevalent yet underestimated in such settings," said Korayem despairingly.

If anything, the population of unplanned settlements is on the rise because of early marriages and high fertility rates amongst the women, observed Korayem. "And yet the fertility rate amongst the middle and upper classes is declining. This means that if this phenomenon goes on, there will be a severe imbalance in society because poverty, unemployment and illiteracy will only increase further," she said.



There are over one thousand unplanned areas throughout the country lacking basic services and infrastructure

Zeinhom zoom

WHEN 35-year-old Sobhi and his 23-year-old wife Hanna saw a snake slithering around their house, they knew they had to do something about their one room, crumbling abode. The couple built their home with their own sweat and blood five years ago in the hilly area of El-Akhsak, the worst area of Zeinhom El-Gedida, one of the numerous randomly built areas in the heart of the Cairo district of Sayeda Zeinab.

Though the couple have built a wooden roof and plastered the walls, they still have no water or sewerage. A gas stove, a dozen dirty dishes and one broken bed propped with a few rocks are all the furnishings they own.

Sobhi makes a living peddling baking powder packets, incense sticks, rulers, pencils and pens, and elastic bands which he buys in El-Muski, near downtown Cairo, and sells in Shubra El-Kheima, a northern suburb of the capital.

"It's tough: one day I earn LE10 pounds and the next two I don't earn anything. For every good month, there is always two bad ones," he lamented.

It is the penniless days that are particularly rough on the family. Hanna's household

money is normally LE5 a day — money which she stretches as far as possible. But, she admits, the family is forced to go without food some days. "Sometimes my daughters wake up in the early hours of the morning, screaming that they are hungry. There is nothing to do but to go for a walk with them so that they do not wake up the neighbours," she said.

"At least you only have two children, what would you do if you had six children like us?" demanded Sobhi's sister, Sabah. Sabah's husband, like Sobhi and most men in the area, is a street peddler. But the LE10-15 her husband makes a day has to cover the costs of their eight-member family.

With only one bed in the room, the girls and boys are continuously fighting over who gets to sleep on the bed and who gets to sleep on the floor. "These people migrated from Upper Egypt in the 1970s, but their ideas and way of life have remained rigidly with them," said Maged Hosni, community worker for the Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services (CEOSS) project in Zeinhom El-Gedida.

CEOSS became involved with the Zeinhom community over a year ago. The non-

governmental organization (NGO) helped build a proper roof and walls for Sobhi's home. Hanna attends CEOSS-sponsored literacy classes three times a week. She also brings her malnourished children to the nutritionist at the CEOSS center.

Whereas in El-Blockat, one room units in blocks of flats, house the "upper class" poor, the inferior El-Arbat quarter houses the "second class" poor — which are mostly female-headed households. Most of the women in El-Arbat have husbands who have been imprisoned for theft, fraud or other criminal activities and who are forced to do low-wage work to support their families.

Yet there are limitations to how many roofs you can patch and how many children you can treat for water-related infections. Ibrahim Makram, assistant

to the general director for Development at CEOSS said that Zeinhom is the fifth project for shanty areas that they have set up in Cairo. CEOSS is working as an intermediary between the local government, the NGOs and the community itself. They are involved in planning the introduction of proper sewerage to be installed next April and a new housing scheme supported by CTKW, a German housing construction company for the

neighbourhood. The under-development of randomly built areas, Makram suggests, is due to the lack of sustained aid by both NGOs and local governments to these communities. "There are about 100 NGOs operating in Sayeda Zeinab but the majority are service-delivery oriented; they perform relief work in the form of crisis intervention, not long term development through the empowerment and participation of the community itself," he said.

Sufra Dayma

Steak in tomato sauce

Ingredients:
1/2 kg beef steaks
1/2 kg fresh tomatoes (skinned)
1 large onion (finely diced)
1 tsp. crushed garlic
1/2 cup carrots (diced)
4 stalks of celery (coarsely chopped)
1 bunch parsley leaves (chopped)
1/2 cup olive oil
1 green pepper (cut in 4)
1 bouillon cube or 1/2 cup stock
flour for coating
salt, pepper, allspice + nutmeg + rosemary

Method:
Marinate the green pepper in the olive oil for 48 hours. Season the steaks with salt and pepper then coat them with flour and fry gently in the olive oil after removing the green pepper. Set the steaks aside and fry the onion and garlic in the same oil until golden, then add the tomatoes after mashing them in the vegetable mincer. Cover and simmer until it thickens, add the fried steaks, the olive plus some water or the stock, then add the carrots and celery. Season with the remaining spices, cover and simmer over low heat until almost cooked. Transfer to an oven dish, cover and continue cooking in a medium heated oven (check if more liquid is needed). Remove from the oven, add the parsley and cover back for a few minutes only before serving. Serve hot with rice and a green salad.

Moushira Abdel-Malek

Restaurant review

Toying with tradition

Nigel Ryan lunches with theme park authenticity

Everywhere you look these days there appears to be a shopping mall, either under construction or just about to open or already operating. And if we can predict anything about the future with certainty, it is that there will be more shopping malls, more of these little and not so little temples to retail that seem to be as much concerned with keeping certain people out as with inviting others in.

The shopping mall is fast becoming a way of life. Once upon a time you took your chances with everyone else, strolled down public streets and into the shops that lined them. Now you pass through security guards, provided courtesy of contract security firms, through electronic gates unable to distinguish between your front door key and half a kilo of Semtex, into a perfectly controlled environment. And since this is a way of life rather than simply a question of popping out to the shop around the corner, shopping malls provide in-house entertainment and places to eat, which range from the swish restaurant to the not-so-swish snack bar.

Despite an aversion to such places I set out merely one lunch time to the Ramsis Hilton shopping centre, friend in tow, to test the recommendation of several colleagues, who swore that Le Rendez Vous, on the ground floor, provided some of the best, traditional fare in town.

I passed through the electronic gate. It beeped. I showed the guards my keys, and passed through again. No beep, and I was in.

There is a ludicrous but rather telling tableau at Le Rendez Vous. Next to a glass hexagonal display cabinet inside which revolve circular glass shelves loaded with French pastries there stands a brightly painted cart — green wheels

with red spokes, primary stripes — draped with the kind of loudly patterned cloth most usually used for wedding or funeral tents. It sits stranded, amid acres of marble tiles, a little bit of the street spruced up, disinfected and brought in doors to lend a little authenticity to this particular aspect of the life style. Behind the cart stands a man in a tall, white chef's hat, supervising the cooking of *ta'ameya* and the filling of *fat sandwiches*, distributing *nashi* and generally doing lots of traditional, culinary things, in this antiseptic and totally untraditional setting.

We sat at a circular table, on metal chairs, and watched people going up and down the escalators. The waiters — *cau de Nil* waistcoats and black bow ties, milled about efficiently. And we ordered, mainly from the cart. *Fat sandwiches*, *ta'ameya*, chicken *shawarma*, a salad and, since this was a little dose of the local, glasses of *karkade*, supplemented by mineral water.

The man in the tall hat set about his business and within minutes the food was plonked down in front of us. And it was all perfectly palatable, if not exactly inspired. The *fat* a little bland, and earnest as only *fat* is earnest, the *ta'ameya* drenched in slightly too runny *tahina*, the *shawarma* heavily laced with slices of thin, hot green peppers. The *karkade* was cloyingly sweet, which is, perhaps, how it should be. We snacked authentically, by the escalators, people watching, paid a bill just under LE30, and then escaped back into the real world.

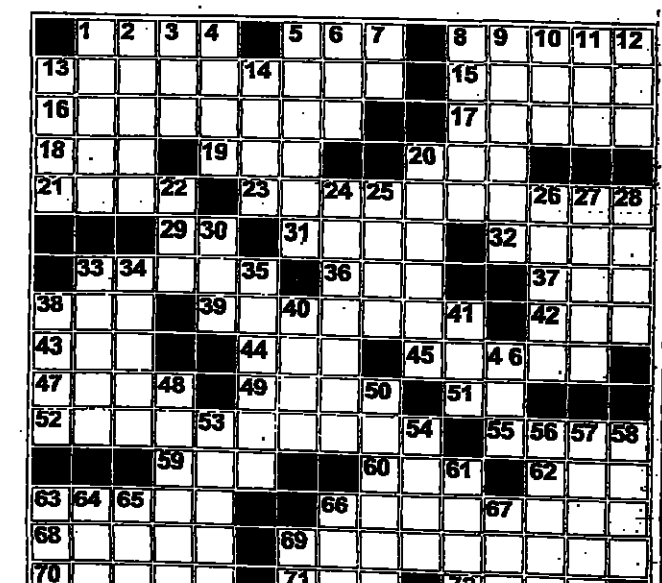
Le Rendez Vous, ground floor, Ramsis Hilton shopping centre (behind the hotel), Corniche El-Nil

Al-Ahram Weekly

Crossword

By Samia Abdennour

- Across**
1. ... Nostra, US branch of Mafia (4)
5. Part of wheel (3)
8. Speeds (5)
13. Ancestral line (9)
15. Enraged (5)
16. Idle (8)
17. Fasten (5)
18. Empower, rent (3)
19. Weather directions (3)
20. Pod veggie (3)
21. Utopia (4)
25. Massive (10)
29. Either's partner (2)
31. Within close range (4)
32. Irish Gaelic (4)
33. Of the sense of sight (5)
36. Stopper (3)
37. Command to horse to go faster (3)
38. In the manner of, 2 weds (3)
39. Adult, hyph. wds (7)
42. Chest (3)
43. Nothing (3)
44. Melee (3)
45. Merits (9)
47. Times just before anything (4)
49. Breach of duty (4)
51. Negation (2)
52. Meteorologist (9)
55. Lament misfortune (4)
59. Disenchant (3)
60. Bora (3)
62. Gore by (3)
63. Umbilical (5)
66. Hero-worshipped (3)
68. Species of gazelle (5)
69. A dish of veal or poultry fillets (9)
70. Batters (5)
71. In physics, a dosage of radiation (3)
72. Fry (4)
Down
1. Best (5)
2. Declaim (5)
3. Describing some wines (3)
4. Poker stake (4)
5. Grotto (6)
6. Time (3)
7. Location of Egypt, Cyprus, Lebanon, abb. (2)
8. Ascended (5)
9. Covered passageway (6)
10. Coach (3)
11. French summer (3)
12. Stitch (3)
13. Amass (4)
14. Colour (4)



20. Placed as an outpost in hiding (6)
22. Negative adverb (3)
24. Nematode insect infesting plants (7)
25. Cardinal (4)
26. Hurdy-gurdy, harmonium (5)
27. Drug addicts (5)
28. Hunt for (4)
30. Manipulate (3)
31. Peace emblem (5)
34. Chafflike bract in flower of grass (5)
35. Boxed (6)
38. Once more (4)
40. Fragrance (4)
41. Kitchen utensil (3)
46. Male gypsy (3)
48. Thoroughfare (6)
50. One in front of the other (6)
53. Small mountains (5)
54. Inert gas (4)
56. Watery hole (5)
57. Chemical used to whiten flour (5)
61. Vivacity (4)
63. Pounce on (3)
64. Part of auxiliary verb (4)
65. Through (3)
66. Wrath (3)
67. Artificial language based on Esperanto (3)
69. King George, abb. (2)

هكذا من الأصل

Night-time confessions



A radio programme that openly discusses sexual issues signals the need for more sex education and hot-line services. Dina Ezzat tunes in

A man who blackmails a former lover for marrying someone else, a girl who feels suicidal because her uncle continually rapes her, or a young man who harbours an obsessive attraction to a famous actress, are all stories that feature on the air during a late-night programme broadcast by the main service of state radio.

For four years, Buthayna Kamel's weekly *Night-time Confessions* has been attempting to scratch beneath the surface of the sexual problems of men and women from different age groups and social backgrounds.

"I was dating a woman and then we slept together. I could not marry her because I did not have enough money and I had too many responsibilities to worry about," one man told Kamel on the phone. Preferring to keep his confession anonymous, the caller explained that he and his girlfriend circumvented the problem by signing an unregistered marriage contract, known as *orfi* marriage.

"We thought that *orfi* marriage was the answer to our problems. It gave us the license to maintain our intimate relationship and granted her a document proving that she is married in case any member of her family found out about our relationship," the caller explained.

But when the woman wanted to end the relationship and marry another man, her boyfriend refused to give her the contract or grant her a divorce. "I allowed her to get married to the other man on the condition that she would still sleep with me. I kept the contract to blackmail her into agreeing to this arrangement," he said.

For a solid hour, late every Friday night, Kamel listens to such intimate confessions. "In the beginning I did not think that this programme would attract so many radio listeners to bare the most intimate details of their lives," said Kamel. But contrary to her apprehensive initial expectations, the programme was not at all confined to the "confessions" of movie stars about the worst role they ever took or the films they are embarrassed to have appeared in.

"When the programme started, the first week of October in 1992, calls and letters from listeners flooded in," Kamel recalled. Some confessions are about ordinary problems — girls and boys who have crushes on famous movie stars, people who are unhappy about their appearances or people who like to pretend that they are from a different social or economic background than they really are.

But, the majority of the letters and telephone calls that Kamel receives concern sexual problems. "They are not even love-life problems like a man who has been rejected by the woman he loves. Of course, there are some calls of this nature, but for the most part I get calls and letters about serious sexual problems," Kamel said. "I get confessions about problems that society would claim do not even exist."

But some of the confessions or stories Kamel receives may be mere fantasies or the product of active imagination. The radio announcer has no way of verifying what she is hearing. One regular anonymous caller pleaded in a letter to Kamel, "I am a man in my early 20s and my mother is my problem." The caller claimed that his mother, a widow, has made him sleep in the same bed with her since he was a little boy. As years passed, the relationship became incestuous. Now the caller wants to escape the shameful relation, but his mother is not letting go.

Truth or sordid imaginings, Kamel explained that the bizarre nature of this particular confession sheds light on the complexity of sexual stress that many people are forced to endure without having anyone to get advice from or even confide in.

One 18-year-old girl phoned in and confided that for years she has hidden from society. "The problem is that every time I laugh, I urinate involuntarily," explained the caller. The young girl said she had not even told her mother about her problem. "All she needs is medical care," advised Kamel.

But the "usual" problems are about girls losing their virginity out of wedlock with men whom, for one reason or the other, they cannot marry; women who are subjected to the brutality of incest; or married individuals who feel guilty about having extra-marital affairs.

"It is very sad. It really is. But society likes to pretend that these problems do not exist," Kamel explained. "They are there and we will all be much better off if we started talking about them and dealing with them."

Not all confessions are broadcast. "There are limits that I cannot go beyond. And this is why I do not receive the calls directly on air; I record them first and if I find them to be the least bit offensive, I tell the caller that the call will not go on the air," she said.

But to provide room for the problems that cannot go on the air, Kamel started a "confessions" corner in several publications. Now, she has a permanent half page in the weekly newspaper *Al-Dustour* under the title "Confess to her".

"In my corner, I have more leeway. I can print letters or transcripts of calls that I would not be able to put on the air," Kamel said. But again there are limits. "For example, I could print a letter about a girl who is consistently raped by her father but I could not print the letter about the man who developed a perverted relationship with his mother."

On the air or in *Al-Dustour*, Kamel said she tries to keep her answers objective: "I avoid taking a stance of any sort. I just try and hint at a possible answer to the problem without really spelling it out."

It is only in cases in which, in Kamel's view, the moral choice is obvious, that her answers are assertive. Responding to the man who confessed to blackmailing an ex-girlfriend, Kamel firmly said, "Stop doing it. If you have an iota of honour or decency in you, stop blackmailing her. Leave her alone!"

Sometimes, the announcer explained, she must give an assertive answer: "If a girl tells me that her boyfriend encourages her to have sex with him I would tell her not to do it simply because I know the great value placed on a girl's virginity in our society."

Kamel admits that since she is not a psychologist or sociologist, she is not qualified to give advice: "I do not really think that this is the role of my programme."

One objective of Kamel's programme is offering solace and comfort. "I often get calls from people who don't want their problem to be broadcast on air. They just need somebody to talk to," she said.

The main purpose of *Night-time Confessions*, according to its announcer, is to shed enough light on these problems and to underline the need to deal with them. She believes that the main message her programme intends to convey is, "whether we like it or not, people have sex lives and thus sex education is a must."

Another message is the need for hot-line services. As Kamel said, "Sometimes people have legal problems to which the answer is very simple. If we had hot-line legal advice these people's lives would be much simpler."

But until the Ministry of Education makes up its mind about sex education courses and the Ministry of Social Affairs starts hot-line services, people will have to listen to a confession that may reflect their own problems.

Is belly dancing, a typically Egyptian art, being threatened or enriched by an influx of well-qualified foreign artistes, asks Sahar El-Bahr



Egypt's most entertaining import: Russian and other foreign belly dancers find Egypt a welcoming place to practise their art

Dance like a Russian

When the going gets tough at home, the brave go out in search of new pastures. This is at least how Russian belly dancers, a recent Egyptian import, explain their presence on a turf which has traditionally belonged to Egyptians.

But are foreign dancers such a new phenomenon? "No," says famous entertainer Samir Sabri, responsible for launching the Russians in our night spots. "In the '40s and '50s there were many foreign troupes which stayed in Egypt for several seasons performing in night clubs. Russian ballet troupes were among the favourites in those days."

Sabri explains the advantages of choosing Russian over Egyptian performers. "Russia," he says, "is famous for its ballet dancers, who now, due to the difficult economic conditions at home, prefer to work in other countries. I hire them because they are first and foremost professionals who started ballet at an early age. They, therefore, learn new routines in a matter of hours and do not mind training long hours, something they are used to doing. Unlike Egyptian belly dancers, they do not specialise in one type of dance. They usually offer a wide range of dances in the same programme."

There seems to be an endless supply of candidates willing and able to fill the hotel night clubs and tourist spots in and around Cairo. With a mercenary business disposition, Sabri takes full advantage of the situation, changing his sets of dancers every six months because, "the easy work conditions in Egypt make them lazy after a while". Furthermore, he explains, one of the most endearing traits of these foreigners is their readiness to work for a pittance especially when they are newcomers, accepting LE30 a show on average.

According to Maj. Gen. Mohsen Hefzi, director of the Tourist Investigation Police, "most hotels and nightclub owners prefer to hire Russian belly dancers

because their wages are low, some of them accepting to work for their accommodation and meals only, others charging \$10 per show."

Girls such as these are quite likely to have been originally brought to Egypt by Sabri. Once their six-month contract is over, they are forced to seek work in almost any night spot that will accept them in order to stay a while longer in Egypt.

How did Samir Sabri hit on the idea of importing belly dancers? "In 1990," he says, "I hired my first dancers through the Egyptian Embassy in Moscow. Later I made direct contacts with ballet troupes in Russia and sent them my specifications. I hire dancers between the ages of 18 and 24 with good professional backgrounds, on the basis of a single six-month contract. At present my troupe includes six dancers, all with professional licences."

Sabri also hires professional Russian trainers and takes pride in being the first to have thought of teaching the girls belly dancing. His troupe represents Egypt in international folk festivals, performs at venues organised by the Ministry of Tourism in Egypt and takes part in Egyptian Tourism Week.

The success of imported dancers is so great that agencies doing a brisk business in providing hotels and night clubs with foreign performers have sprouted in Egypt. The agencies are also taking over the market for providing dancers at weddings and private parties.

After the establishment of the Reda Folklore Troupe in the sixties, there was a revival of interest in Egyptian folkloric dances in general and belly dancing in particular. It became fashionable to have a famous belly dancer performing at upper class weddings. The art moved from local night spots to five-star hotels, thanks in particular to tourist interest, and finally found its way to dance studios, where housewives practise the steps, wearing elegant training suits, and afterwards display their progress to female friends. Meanwhile,

famous dancers were starring in films and the fees they charged increased proportionally to their popularity. Some bumped their fee up so high that they priced themselves out of the market.

Moving out of its natural boundaries, belly dancing found enthusiasts in Europe and the United States, where it was taught seriously in dance studios and learned without any cultural connotations.

In Egypt, lower and middle class families will often discourage their daughters from taking up dancing, considering it socially unacceptable as a career. Foreigners have been only too happy to step in and fill the void.

Twenty-year-old Elena, for example, is a university graduate in meteorology who dances by night to pay for the English lessons she attends during the day. Elena wants to learn English to help her earn a good salary in Russia where foreign languages have become a marked advantage among those applying for jobs in many professions. Although there are many English-language institutes in Russia, Elena feels she has more opportunities to practise her speaking skills here. She found it quite easy to learn to belly dance, she says, and now practises for three to four hours a day.

Elena's friend Nadia, who just came for a visit "to see some of my colleagues who have married Egyptian men", enjoys performing at night. For her, belly dancing presents little problem as she mastered modern ballet in Russia. But Nadia does not intend to stay long. She complains that the mentality of Egyptians differs from hers in too many ways. But as many avenues have opened up for her in modelling, ads and video clips, she shows no signs of going yet. In these fields also she charges less than her Egyptian counterparts do.

It is often claimed that the success of the foreigners is due to their physical appearance, which is so different from that of traditional Egyptian belly dancers.

But Walid Awini, head of the Modern Dance Theatre Troupe, disagrees: the Russians, he says, are popular not because of the colour of their eyes, hair or complexion, but because they are better qualified and more skilful than Egyptians due to their high physical fitness and suppleness. "The outcome is that the Egyptian dancer rarely improves, feels frustrated and then gives up," says Awini. But, Awini complains, "I am very upset whenever I see the Russians representing Egypt at international festivals inside and outside Egypt. They may be qualified, but their bodies, features and spirit are alien to what is typically Egyptian."

Awini attributes the present problems basically to a lack of funds. Egyptian dancers are not trained properly from an early age. He suggests that instead of spending money on foreign dancers we should use the funds to train our own dancers better.

The dancers themselves, however, do not seem to feel that they are in competition with each other. While the Russians voice the belief that in a competitive market the job is given to the best, Egyptian belly dancer Amany claims that only three two-star hotels are employing Russian dancers. So what is the fuss all about? Famous Egyptian dancers will always have an edge in five-star hotels, she says. Besides, there are many Egyptian dancers performing abroad.

Egyptian authorities are, nevertheless, starting to worry. Faced with such an influx, some ground rules had to be laid down. According to Maj. Gen. Osama Fikri, former head of the Tourist and Antiquities Police, a committee including officials from the General Censorship on Works of Art and the Ministry of Interior recently came up with recommendations aimed at organising and restricting the work of foreign dancers in such a way that they do not deprive Egyptians of employment.

Red Sea ravages

Coral reef destruction continues. Will authorities be able to stop it? Sherine Nasr investigates

The year 1996 has so far witnessed two significant coral reef destruction crises. The first occurred in April, when a British tourist cruiser, "Royal Viking Sun", drifted off course in the Straits of Tiran. The second, two months later, came when the Cypriot ship "Million Hope", loaded with almost 26,000 tons of phosphates and potassium, sank in Ras Nasrani at the mouth of the Gulf of Aqaba. Part of the cargo, which dissolved in the water, and a huge oil leak from the ship's fuel tank caused extreme damage to the marine life in nearby areas.

Damages were estimated at \$23 million for the "Royal Viking Sun" and \$14 million for the "Million Hope". Despite these large compensations, the harm inflicted on the marine environment is virtually irreparable. Both accidents left behind more than three square kilometres of damaged coral reefs. "It will take the afflicted areas at least a hundred years to return to their original state," said Salah Hafez, executive director of the Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency (EEAA).

Most of the accidents take place in the Straits of Tiran, at the southern tip of the Gulf of Aqaba. "Navigating through these straits is not easy. They are extremely narrow, no more than 800 metres wide, and the current is very strong. This means that a ship travelling only 100 metres off course can easily cause very serious problems," said Captain Mostafa Taher, head of a Hurgada-based non-governmental organisation concerned with environmental protection.

International navigation laws do not allow excessive speed or the use of automatic navigational devices when negotiating a strait. "The problem is that captains usually use the 'automatic pilot'. This device works well in open ocean navigation, but because the strait is so narrow, the slightest change in direction can cause severe accidents," Taher said.

Hafez declared it is often the captain's mistake. "If the captain is alert and experienced enough, the risks are minimal," he said.

The navigational route along the gulf is defined by only a few radar reflectors and navigational lights which, Captain Taher feels, are hardly sufficient. "There is no surveillance system to monitor the incoming and outgoing vessels and ensure that they are following the correct lane," Taher explained.

The fact that the Gulf of Aqaba is literally the only outlet for Jordan and Israel on the Red Sea and that dozens of gigantic trans-oceanic vessels, each loaded with cargo weighing no less than 70,000 tons, pass through it daily, makes it likely that further threats to the safety of the coral reefs will arise.

Major General Mohsen El-Masri, head of the Red Sea Harbours, ruled out suggestions to monitor the navigational route more closely. He indicated that navigation through this international route is determined by specific maps and directives and that none of the four countries overlooking it — Egypt, Jordan, Israel and Saudi Arabia — should bear sole responsibility for its regulation. "There are lanes for entering and exiting. These are marked by buoys in

the daytime and lights at night," he said. El-Masri asserted that accidents are the exception. "Dozens of ships pass through safely every day," he said. "It's only during a crisis that so much attention is drawn to these issues."

Providing the ships with a guide boat on their passage through the straits, as is sometimes done in the Suez Canal, was another suggestion which proved impractical. "It is not only expensive but essentially impossible," said Hafez, who explained that weather conditions in this area are usually adverse.

"There are strong currents and guide boats would drift easily," he said.

The customary procedure, following a major accident, is to take the captain into custody and begin investigating the damage. Scientists and expert divers from the Oceanography Institute conduct a field survey, gathering samples from the water for analysis.

"The reef's destruction is measured by subtracting the amount of dead coral from the total area where the accident took place," said Dr Ahmed Helmi, head of the institute. Dead coral is solid, black and covered by layers of sediment. "In approximately a week, the institute issues a report describing the bio-



In 1991, the giant sea carrier Salem Express sank near Safage after crashing into coral reefs. Removing shipwrecks (above) can cause additional harm to reefs

logical, chemical, geographical and geological impact of the accident," he said.

The "Million Hope" incident spilled a large quantity of phosphates into the water, causing the rapid growth of water moss. "It blocked the reefs from the sun, eventually causing their destruction," Helmi said.

Removing the shipwreck or sunken cargo may cause additional harm to the coral reefs. "We are obliged to assume a certain degree of risk to the environment during our rescue operations in order to remedy the situation," Hafez said.

Some experts believe that placing a radar station at

the mouth of the Gulf of Aqaba would provide the only definitive protection against further accidents. "It is a good suggestion, yet extremely expensive," said Hafez. He added that a watch tower and a number of wireless stations could prove equally effective. "Both recommendations are being carefully considered," he said.

Another common and equally dangerous threat is posed by luxury tourist boats, whose numbers and operations are growing steadily along the Red Sea coast, the Gulf of Aqaba and around Ras Mohammed National Park. "These boats drop anchor over the reefs, thereby destroying them. The guides on board are usually illiterate and have not had the necessary environmental awareness training," said Helmi.

He added that 90 per cent of the reef damage off Hurgada is due to these boats' activities. To curb the destruction of the reefs, the EEAA has imposed certain regulations on boats at Ras Mohammed National Park. "They must have a licence to anchor in the park, and are only allowed to use the mooring buoys. There are also 24-hour patrol boats and a number of trained rangers to make sure that no violations take place," said Hafez.

Tourist villages in Hurgada are now asking the Oceanography Institute to pinpoint the location of coral reefs and install "no approach" signs for their vessels.



Austria's George Froind rallying to the first place



photos: Abeer Anwar

Wheel win again

Blessed with the warm weather of South Sinai Egyptian disabled athletes participated in the 1st Sinai Rally for Wheelchairs held from 7-12 October. Abeer Anwar attended

The Egyptian Handicapped Federation together with Misr Sinai travel agency sponsored the newly inaugurated Sinai Rally for Wheelchairs, held in the Governorate of South Sinai, to raise the awareness of physical disability in Egypt.

"The idea's genesis came after the achievements of the disabled athletes in the Atlanta Olympics," commented Dr Abdel-Azim Bassiouni, chairman of the federation board.

The race, which challenges the athletes to the limits of their endurance, is divided into five stages. The first covers the 100km span from Sharm El-Sheikh to Dahab while the second stage traverses the 70km from Dahab to Nuweiba. The athletes then move on to the third from Nuweiba to Pharaoh's Island, a 65km distance and the fourth featuring a return trip from Pharaoh's Island back to Nuweiba. The rally then culminates in the longest stage — the 110km from Nuweiba to Saint Catherine.

Other reasons behind the rally, cited by the federation, were to commemorate and honour the soldiers of the 1973 war and to support sports tourism in Sinai.

Austria's George Froind, 52, a well known champion in wheelchair marathons, returned to competition after 10 years in retirement following a special invitation from the federation. Froind was among 28 athletes participating in the six-day event, including six veterans of the October War.

The Austrian racer was the only athlete able to complete the first four stages before he also succumbed to exhaustion. The inability of the athletes to complete the rally will, in all likelihood, force a rethinking of the length of the course in future.

"It was a very nice experience but it was the hardest I have ever attempted," commented Froind.

The Austrian used a modern wheelchair design, featuring three gears, for his undertaking. The chair differed from the usual ones sported in rallies and marathons and is normally only used in sports festivals. Froind took the lead in the rally, chalking up 300km in four stages. He was followed by first-time rally participant, Egypt's Mahmoud El-Sawah with an 84km aggregate. "I wanted to continue but my coaches prevented me," said a tearful Sawah.

Dr Abul-Makarem, one of Sawah's coaches, explained his decision to end the athlete's try, saying "It is the first time for these athletes to attempt such a long distance and they are very enthusiastic about it and full of challenge but if I didn't prevent him on the first day, by the second or third day, he would not be able to compete." He also stressed the difference in equipment between the Austrian racer and those used by Egyptians which provided an advantage that Sawah could not compete against.

Out of safety considerations the athletes were accompanied by a fleet of automobiles including an ambulance, a water provision car and three police vehicles. The coaches were spread at intervals along the road to supervise and assist in the event of unforeseen difficulties. One such calamity befell Ashraf El-Kholi who came third with an aggregate of 62km. In the second stage of the rally, he had a flat tyre but continued on in spite of the double effort he was forced to exert. It is that spirit and will that enabled the athletes to bring

home such a large number of medals from the Paralympic Games. The athletes were hardly back from Atlanta when many were recruited to represent Egypt in the rally. The Egyptian Handicapped Federation also requested the government to recommend athletes able to score high in the nationals. Each athlete took on the responsibility for his own training as there was no time to set up an official programme. The athletes even constructed their own wheelchairs. "No one knows how to make our chairs better than us because each one of us knows his disability and what suits it," commented one athlete.

Dr Nabil Salem, head of the Egyptian federation, expressed his great admiration for what the Egyptian athletes were able to accomplish. "I did not imagine that the Egyptian athletes would be able to reach to the last stages of the race. The maximum distance they trained to endure was five kilometres. A number of companies have expressed a willingness to sponsor the federation and the athletes by purchasing a number of rally chairs at a cost of 7,000 dollars each," added Salem.

South Sinai's governor, Major Mamdouh El-Zohieri welcomed the idea of Sinai hosting the yearly wheelchair rally after its great success. "We welcome such events especially that it is a new and special way of celebrating the 6 October victory. We will invite more countries to increase the number of players competing and offer them the proper atmosphere of competition and we are willing to offer all the facilities to make the rally successful," he said.

Building up

OVER 3,000 fans attended the Egyptian National Bodybuilding Championship in Nasr City. The popularity of the sport has been on the wane despite Egypt's ranking as third in the world and the large number of spectators marks a resurgence in interest. The championship was the first step of the Egyptian Bodybuilding Federation's plans to muscle its way through a series of world-wide championship wins.

"The competition started with 160 of the best Egyptian bodybuilders competing against each other in order to choose the best for the planned world championships," commented Adel Faheem, president of the federation.

There are plans afoot for Egyptian bodybuilders to compete in 24 championships over the next year. The first is the world championship for juniors and masters (over 40) to be held on 17 October in Poland. Next in line will be the African championship in Johannesburg from 24-28 October. "The third, our major event, is scheduled for the 11-16 November at the world championships in Jordan which will be attended by the congress of the International Bodybuilding Federation," added Faheem.

Egypt, which boasts five time World Champion Anwar El-Amsawy, is submitting its nomination to host a world championship to be held in the year 2002.

Spartacus the mighty

IN A ONE-round league tournament match Hungary's Spartacus bested compatriot UZMK Eger 12-10 in a decisive final to clinch the trophy of the Seventh International Heliopolis Water Polo Championship. Four national and five club teams representing eight nations — Italy, Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, Lebanon, Poland, Russia, and Hungary — faced off in the tournament. But Spartacus, with 164 goals scored, was unstoppable, winning all eight of its matches. Third place went to the Tunisia, Morocco, Russia and Holiday Beach of Morocco placed sixth to ninth respectively.

Defending champions, Egypt's Heliopolis team, despite an all out effort, were unable to retain the title. The Egyptian squad managed fifth place after winning four matches, losing three and drawing one. "This year the participating teams were stronger opponents. We played good matches, and lost others," said team captain Mazen Mourad, 29. "But the experience we gained from playing with top teams is much more beneficial than winning the cup itself. Our level has definitely improved, and this will help us in competing in both the national league and cup championships," he added.

Hungary triumphed again as Spartacus' Gabour Neimes walked away with the best goalkeeper trophy and fellow Hungarian Attila Beiter of the Eger team was named best player. The top scorer title went to Poland's Sles Marious.

Courting the stars

AFTER A FIVE year hiatus the Egyptian International Tennis Championship resumed this week in Cairo under the auspices of the Egyptian Tennis Federation (ETF). 120 players gathered at the Gezira Sporting Club for the resurrected event. The tournament, considered a Challenger Competition, features a \$75,000 prize pool and has attracted top players Alberto Berasategui, ranked 19 and Morocco's world-ranked 52nd Karim El-Alami.

The championship, held continuously at the Gezira Sporting Club from 1907 until 1990, is considered one of the oldest international tennis championships. It is only preceded by the four major Grand Slams: Wimbledon, 1877, the US Open, 1881, Roland Garros, 1891 and the Australian Open 1905. The tournament was rehabilitated after a solution was found to the financial doldrums which had halted the competition.

The first Egyptian player to collect the prize was the 1946 winner Adli Al-Shafie, father of early 1970s Wimbledon junior champion Ismail Al-Shafie.

The tournament victor will collect \$7,200 plus 70 ranking points while the runner-up will take \$4,240 and 50 points. Mohamed Halawa, ETF president, revealed that the federation, is optimistic the competition will develop from the Challenger level to a Super Series competition with 125,000 dollars in prize money. It is hoped that in the years to come the championship's pedigree will attract the world's great tennis stars. Egypt has eight players competing in the ATP sponsored tournament: six played in the preliminaries and two, Amr Ghoneim and Gihad El-Deeb, joined the main draw with the wild card.

Phoenix on court

After sweating it out on the tennis courts of the Gezira Sporting Club at the 74th Egyptian International Tennis Championship, the always-hopeful tennis player Alberto Berasategui, currently seeded no. 19, together with his coach, Javier Martinez, spoke to Nashwa Abdel-Tawab

Nowadays ranking alongside the US and Germany in both the men's and the women's tennis competitions, Spain stunned the world back in 1994, when it dominated the tennis courts in what was known as Spain's golden year in tennis. That year, three of the four finalists at the French Open were Spaniards — men's singles' champion Sergi Bruguera, runner-up Alberto Berasategui and the women's champion, Arantxa Sanchez Vicario.

Alberto Berasategui is in Cairo for the 74th Egyptian International Tennis Championship currently underway at the Gezira Sporting Club from 14-21 October. Berasategui and his coach Javier Martinez spoke to *Al-Ahram Weekly* in between matches.

Berasategui decided to play on the Gezira tournament's clay courts,

rather than the cement courts of France's coinciding Toulouse Indoor Competition on the advice of his consultant, The Advantage Company.

Since hard court players are masters of the game — the ball is faster on hard courts — the Spanish players, best on clay courts, are trying to improve their game on hard courts in order to make their way to the top.

"I'm good on clay but weak on hard courts because the ball [moves] faster than me," explained the 23-year-old Berasategui.

He added that while he needs to play on hard courts, for now his goal is to keep his rank among the top 20. Moreover, he was aware, through the grapevine, that the Egyptian International Tennis Championship is considered a Challenger Competition by the Association of Tennis Players (ATP).

After the 1996 US Open, according to ATP rankings, 14 Spanish players rose into the top 100. There are five in the top 30, two less than the US' seven.

One of the main reasons for the success of the Spaniards has been their ability to overcome the so called small-nation syndrome, a condition that diminishes the confidence and expectations of players from nations that are not traditional tennis powers.

The Spanish accomplished this by establishing a genuine if tenuous tradition, and investing an enormous amount of manpower and money, much of it from government agencies, into cultivating that tradition.

The Spanish system is run by the Royal Spanish Tennis Federation, but a great deal of the groundwork in this fiercely regional nation is performed by 17 semi-autonomous, territorial federations. These local federations work very closely with tennis clubs and public institutions to make tennis accessible to all Spaniards, especially encouraging the juniors. Berasategui explained that while most professional players have their own coaches, the juniors are sponsored through a programme set up following the Barcelona Olympic Games.

Berasategui started his professional career at the age of 19. At the end of that year he was ranked 110. By the age of 20, he was 36, at 21, he cracked the world top 10 reaching 8th. But the pressure and the stress of media attention, not to mention his fans, exacted a toll his abilities couldn't match and his ranking dropped back to 36. After overcoming his mental distress, with the help of his coach, this year he played well enough to reach 19. Berasategui is determined, "hoping", to keep his rank in the top 20. "Maybe someday I'll repeat what I've done before and better than that even," said Berasategui.

Berasategui's coach, Dr Javier Martinez, prefers to be called an adviser. The 38-year-old doctor is a family practitioner specialised in sports medicine. "I've never played tennis before but I'm a tennis lover," said Martinez, "I can help in his playing by detecting his faults and advising him to overcome his rival in the quickest way. But if I played tennis with him, I'd be boring him since he will train me and not vice versa."

Martinez began training Berasategui three years ago when he only ranked 80. Berasategui had total belief in the abilities of the calm doctor as an adviser, saying that "he helped me a lot. I knew he wasn't a coach but there are risks that you have to take... Now I'm happy with it."

Martinez sets aside special time to practise medicine in an exchange arrangement with a group of doctors which allows him to have time with Berasategui. During the matches, Martinez leaves Berasategui on court alone. "If I stayed with him, he will keep on looking at me to see my facial expressions and will get stressed," said the doctor who treats Berasategui as a son or an elder brother. "He doesn't lack self-confidence but he is keen to improve, so he can be easily put under pressure."

Berasategui is known on the circuit as the "Camele" for his refusal to drink water during matches. He feels, despite his coach's insistence that the body needs replenishment, that it would affect his game. This year Berasategui is playing 30 tournaments to achieve his goal of remaining in the top 20. The Spaniard has won eight tournaments this year and he hopes to win the Egyptian International Tennis Championship.

His ever patient coach, at least, sees no insurmountable obstacles to Berasategui's phoenix-like rise. "By following my instructions and playing on hard courts," said Martinez, "Berasategui will come back again."

Edited by Inas Mazhar

Ministry of Education

Book Sector

School Book Competition

for the academic year

1997/1998

The ministry of education announces a competition in writing school books

for the preparatory stage

General & Vocational

- 1- Social Studies Book - General Prep. School
2- Third Grade General Prep. school

- Vocational Preparatory
Second & Third Stages

Subject	Grade	Note
1- Islamic studies	Third	Student's Book
2- Christian studies	Third	Student's Book
3- Arabic language (Two books)	Third	Student's Book
A- Texts B- Grammar	Third	Student's Book
4- Mathematics (Two books)	Third	Student's Book
a- Algebra b- Geometry	Third	Student's Book
5- Science	Third	Student's Book
6- Social studies (History - Geography)	Third	Student's Book
7- Music	Third	Student's Book
8- House management studies	Third	Student's Book
9- Technical studies	Third	Student's Book
10- Agricultural studies	Third	Student's Book
11- Commerce	Third	Student's Book
12- Art	Third	Student's Book
13- Technology	Third	Student's Book
14- Maintenance & overhaul	Third	Student's Book
15- Sports	Third	Teacher's Guide

Subject	Grade	Note
1- Islamic studies	Second	Student's Book
2- Christian studies	Second	Student's Book
3- Arabic language	Second	Student's Book
4- English language	Second	Student's Book
5- French language	Second	Student's Book
6- Mathematics	Second	Student's Book
7- Science	Second	Student's Book
8- Social studies	Second	Student's Book
9- Music	Second	Student's Book
10- House management	Second	Student's Book
11- Technical studies	Second	Student's Book
12- Agricultural studies	Second	Student's Book
13- Commerce	Second	Student's Book
14- Art	Second	Student's Book
15- Technology	Second	Student's Book
16- Maintenance & overhaul	Second	Student's Book
17- Sports	Second	Teacher's Guide

Rewards

The winner will be awarded LE 30,000. Three other books will be given prizes ranging from LE 2000 - LE 5000 as the appraisal committee considers worthy.

Competition regulations and application forms to be requested from the Book Sector, Ministry of Education - 3 Safia Zaghloul St., Mobtedian - Cairo within 10 days from the date of this advertisement from 10 a.m. - 2 p.m. in return for L.E. 50 to be mailed in the name of the General Director of Book Writing Dept.

Subject	Grade	Note
1- Islamic studies	Second	Student's Book
2- Christian studies	Second	Student's Book
3- Arabic language	Second	Student's Book
4- English language	Second	Student's Book
5- French language	Second	Student's Book
6- Mathematics	Second	Student's Book
7- Science	Second	Student's Book
8- Social studies	Second	Student's Book
9- Music	Second	Student's Book
10- House management	Second	Student's Book
11- Technical studies	Second	Student's Book
12- Agricultural studies	Second	Student's Book
13- Commerce	Second	Student's Book
14- Art	Second	Student's Book
15- Technology	Second	Student's Book
16- Maintenance & overhaul	Second	Student's Book
17- Sports	Second	Teacher's Guide

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Moushira Abdel-Malek

stands a brightly painted cart — green wheels —

El-Nil

هكذا من الأصل

The divid man

The pose, the stare
and the style. The
cheers and the jeers.
For a while, Chris
Eubank seemed to
have it all —
everything, that is,
but respect, writes
Tarek El-Tablawy, who
with Inas Mazhar,
spent a few days
with the champ



His reputation precedes him. Ominously so. Reporters from the British dailies call up *Al-Ahram Weekly*, requesting information about Chris Eubank's up-coming fight in Cairo. But when asked about Eubank, they have nothing positive to say. "Watch out," they caution. "He's slick," says another reporter. And so was my unofficial introduction to the 30-year-old boxer, the UK's former WBC International Middleweight Champion, WBO World Middleweight Champion and WBO Super-Middleweight Champion.

On the stats sheet, his record is undeniably impressive. Out of 47 professional fights, he has won 43, lost 2 and drawn in 2. He holds the record for the greatest number of consecutive title defenses: 19; and is known as "the man whose unpopularity is his greatest asset." Accolades aside, a less than suspicious welcome to Cairo for a man planning to stage a professional come-back after one year of retirement.

One would expect that given such a reputation, Chris would be on the defensive. I am, after all, a member of that fraternity of scribblers which has so dutifully and diligently lambasted him on the back pages of the papers. But he is unfazed and not the least bit embarrassed to discuss these points.

"I had an image," says Chris. "I created that image — that of the showman — and that's all they focused on." He pauses, then begins again, his voice tinged with regret and frustration.

"In the UK, the media doesn't want to focus on my human side. They see me as a commodity for filling their back pages."

"They've transformed me into a kind of cartoon character — one who's not real, who's outrageous, a showman, which I am." He stops short again and frowns.

"But that's only part of me."

THERE ARE BASICALLY two kinds of celebrities: those who think that there is no meaning to life but their own. Chris, sometimes viewed as being the latter, is actually more thoughtful than that.

He has a clear image of himself, one in which he is loyal, straightforward and considerate, looking after those who depend on him while simultaneously trying to impart to impoverished inner-city youth the understanding that they not only have a choice, they have a responsibility to better themselves.

Chris's opinion of himself, justified or not, is extremely compelling, simply because he believes in it absolutely and in my presence, lives up to it completely. I see nothing of the man who has been denied in the press for being arrogant, pretentious, cold and insensitive.

In the ring, he is known for his ferocity and temper and burning spirit, but away from the arena, there is none of this, anywhere. There is only a soft, at times weary, voice emanating from a man scarred from one too many tongue lashings.

So how does one reconcile such conflicting images of one who says: "I'm a kind man; a family man who believes in integrity, commitment, hard work and standing up for your convictions, but none of that is recognised," yet was grilling in the papers for not being sorry enough over the injuries sustained by Michael Watson after their second fight. Well, it doesn't hurt to ask, but the answer is not much of a surprise.

"How sorry can you be. When you're sorry, you're sorry. I was deeply upset about what happened."

"If they're saying 'We'd like you to be more sorry,' then teach me how and I'll do it." He's irritated. Rightly so, for while others have enjoyed similar success, and endured similar tragedies, in the ring, they have not been subjected to this kind of constant scrutiny which few would stand for — or pass. During Chris's hey-day, reports abounded about his frequent shopping expeditions to Saville Row and Jermyn Street, his cruising around London on his motorcycle, popping in on his media friends. Was this flamboyance and arrogance? No. He, like others of similar fame and fortune, is merely enjoying the fruits of his efforts. The real Chris — the man he would have the world finally know — is of the type which seeks to translate their professional achievements into a source of motivation for those still trapped in the inner-cities. This is the kind of achievement he yearns for and, so far, has eluded him.

BEING THE BEST is not a category you can quantify. It has a certain feeling to it. It has to do with how sincerely and convincingly you are able to embrace those values you would have others associate with your image and personality. And how committed you are to being yourself — reconciling your Jekyll with your Hyde — coming to terms with that emotional and intellectual endorphin that drives one to succeed. It is this drive that forces the boxer out of bed at 5:00am each morning, for a 10km run in the rain, when his body is crying for more sleep. This Chris has done. No one, however, wants to pay attention.

The reason, to be honest, is that people don't expect — or want — boxers to be intelligent or to wax philosophical. Nevertheless, that is exactly what he is. Chris is a philosopher of sorts, often likening boxing to chess or to life. In journalism, these sound bites

have come to be known as *Eubankisms*. He likes to say to interviewers: "I have a point of view; one to which I'm entitled and which should be respected." Again, however, there are few takers except for those who turn the statements into a source of ridicule and tabloid fodder.

"I try to make a point — to help out the children and to stress that they are our future." He shakes his head, resignedly. "No matter how much I try talking about this, the message is never taken on board. It's never given the respect it deserves."

"They [the press] are only interested in stereotyping me, but I refuse to let this happen. So, instead, they try to assassinate my character, focus on a trivial point and magnify it."

"In the States, if you're accomplished in my field, you're spotlighted and your success is used to help children through foundations and charities. In England, this kind of success is kept low key — as if to say: 'Well, you're here to entertain and when you fizzle out, you fizzle out.' The government doesn't encourage you to set up projects to take sports into the inner city to help youngsters. I've tried. I've built a 69-flat project for the homeless, spoken for charity, but it's more lucrative to write about my showmanship during a match than to focus on my human side."

Another shake of the head. Another sigh. Another pause. "I can't think of one person they've used to take sports in the inner city and push youngsters up."

SOMETHING HAPPENS TO CHRIS when he gets ready to step into the ring. His quiet, tempered demeanor is eclipsed by a cocky self-assurance, a swaggering gait, the cold, hard stare of someone who's got unfinished business to take care of. As any fighter knows, this much is necessary in order to be able to come to terms with the disturbing reality that your opponent wants nothing more than to blast your head off. This is the identity of the showman and the professional.

Unfortunately, it also only marginally alludes to the grace and nobility that lies beneath this veneer. Fleet Street has been unwilling, or more alarmingly, unable, to distinguish between the two. For this shortcoming, Chris is unforgiving and more than saddened. And in

the manner of those who know when to get out, he resigned from boxing one year ago, realising that professionally, he may have bitten off more than he could chew.

In retrospect, did he expect the media to be any different? "Maybe I was naive, but yes, I did. To me, a man is judged not just by what he accomplishes professionally, but by what he stands up for and accomplishes on a personal level. Understanding and accepting this, however, was not on the media's agenda."

There are no "maybes" here. Chris, whether he realised it or not, liked the showman. That much is evident in the way he hurdles the ropes and enters the ring. But even this is done with a measure of grace and nobility and bashful acceptance of a man who knows he is good, but would have the world respect him for his real character versus that of Eubank the boxer.

"In the end, I decided to retire because I had achieved all I wanted to in boxing. My record will be a hard one to break. But the real achievement, getting the message across, that didn't happen."

IN THE MIDDLE of our third session, a pair of journalists arrive for an interview — an hour late, but he is more than accommodating. "Do you mind if I talk with them now," he asks me.

No. "But stay. I want you to stay."

They want to talk boxing, which is fine with him. It is here, however, that I begin to see where Chris went astray in attempting to get his message across. At the times when he should be promoting his views — when people want to see his "real" side, he is talking about other things. At other times, invariably the wrong ones, he seems to be trying too hard to make his point — and the press has interpreted this as an attempt to overcompensate. It isn't.

Not all who have talked to him, however, have been as charmed as I. With others, he has sometimes been seen as curt. If so, it is because while his message is perhaps not unique, for all its simplicity, it is not understood. Or, more likely, ignored.

After a few questions, they leave, satisfied. "What did you think," he asks me. "Any different?" It's not my place, though, to comment.

THE STORY GOES that a Saudi princess he met in London, a long-time fan, encouraged him to make a comeback — in the Middle East. Any story with a princess is destined to sound a bit dodgy and, again, the British press was quick to point this out. This time, Chris is unfazed. The 19 October bout against Argentina's Barrera is, after all, a fresh start, with a whole new, hearty helping of media waiting in the ranks, pens poised.

But for Chris, this is not another money-making opportunity reminiscent of the six million pounds sterling deal with Rupert Murdoch's Sky Channel. It is, by his own admission, a chance to bring professional boxing "into a region that needs it."

More importantly, he says, "it's another chance to get the message across. To try to help shape children by teaching them values and instilling in them traits like discipline, integrity, dedication, commitment, perseverance, self-confidence and self-control."

Altruism aside, from a man who has repeatedly denounced the sport as being crooked, isn't this a bit of a paradox, I ask him.

"Boxing is a dirty business and is filled with shady people. But as a martial art it provides children with some core values for their lives."

True, but aren't there better ways of passing on this knowledge?

"Where I come from — the inner city — ghetto kids aren't supposed to beat the system. If you're a boxer in the UK, you're not supposed to be that intelligent. You're supposed to be a bit rough and ready; not to articulate a point of view. You're supposed to like what you do, which is NOT something I've done."

He smiles, a little ruefully.

For me, boxing is a platform I've used to get a constructive message across on a grassroots level. I'm good at what I do. People are impressed by what I do. They like the way I make it look easy. What I wanted to do, and still am trying to do, is to teach youngsters that it takes discipline and hard work to succeed. If you do what your competition is doing, you'll be like the competition. You have to do more to be more."

THE MESSAGE, IN EUBANKISM, he says with a smile, is "A winner never quits and a quitter never wins." Call me a traitor to journalism, but I can't help but be impressed. Not because he was able to put together such a glib comment, but because it is sincere.

"Here in Egypt, now, I'm making a fresh start. I'm my own manager, my own promoter. Maybe if people refuse to respect me as a boxer, they'll respect the fact that I'm managing my own career. In this way, maybe the message will be heard."

But what of the money? Few, if any are truly charitable in the real sense of the word.

"I came here because I want to do something constructive to help the youngsters out. I'm petitioning President Mubarak to establish a foundation which will allow Egyptian children and boxers to learn how to box — properly. Not only do I plan on coming here to teach in it, but it would be an honour."

Why should this fly in Egypt when it didn't go over too well in England, I ask.

"The values instilled in a person through boxing are like the values promoted by Islam: discipline, integrity, nobility, perseverance, respect..."

Impressive. Who said boxer's can't think or read between the lines.

MONDAY: AT THE MAADI Olympic Training Centre, Chris has just finished his workout. We are standing on one side, discussing his training schedule, his prediction for the fight and his post-fight plans.

His gaze softens, becomes wistful. There is longing in his eyes as he starts speaking about his wife, Karen, who is due to give birth to their fourth child in around a week. I ask him if he wants a boy or a girl.

"Either. A boy would be nice. A girl would be better. With my sons, I'm a disciplinarian." Best to start when they're young. "Yes."

"But with Emily, it's different. There's a bond — an intimacy." Daddy's little girl. "Precisely."

CHRIS IS SMILING OPENLY, now. This is one of those few, perfect moments for him. He is at ease, both with himself and with the decisions he has made about the future. In his mind, his point of view is clear and in mine, equally so.

For all anyone knows, life could unfold as he would have it — as it is pictured in his mind — the battles and challenges fought with a measure of nobility, poise and the conviction that he is right. Or, by his own admission, "Life is like a boxing match, whoever loses his form first, loses the match." In either case, Chris's toughest challenges and most revered accomplishments in the future, may be hard fought outside the ring — the one place where he is, undisputedly, Simply the Best.

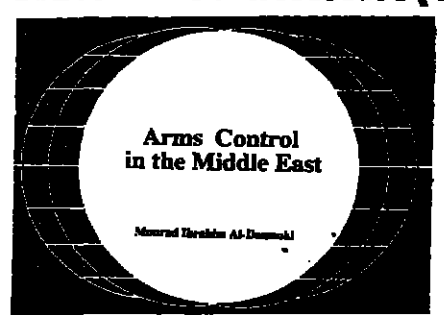
THE BREAKFAST of champions, more often than not, is simply roadwork. Nearly every morning, roughly at 7:00am, Chris Eubank is out on the street, burning up the miles, building up more endurance. While in Cairo, it's essentially more of the same. Whether jogging or working out at the Maadi Olympic Training Centre, at these times, Eubank is at his business. There is too much at stake, too much invested to approach the sport half-heartedly. "The commitment of fighting is hard; training and leading the Spartan lifestyle is hard. The easy part is turning pro," he says.

But what is it that really makes a champion. "You've got to be able to pull one out at the right moment in a fight — even if you feel you can't. That's what being a champion is all about," states Eubank's trainer, Ronny Davis.



Photos: Hossein Dib

KURASAT ISTRATIJIYA (42)



(In Arabic and English)

- | | |
|--|---------------------------------|
| 23- Intra-Arab State Conflicts | Mohamed Abdel-Salam |
| 24- The League of Arab States: Prospective Challenges | Dr. No'man Galal |
| 25- Islamic Fundamentalism and its Image in the Western Media | Dr. Olfat H. Agha |
| 26- Management of Ethnic Issues in the Arab World | Dr. Saad El Ibrahim |
| 27- Mediterraneanism: A New Dimension in Egypt's Foreign Policy | Dr. Mohamed El Sayed Selim |
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| 29- Conventional Arms Control in The Middle East: | Dr. Abdel Monem Said |
| | Ahmed Ibrahim Mahmoud |
| 30- The Clash of Civilizations and the Humanitarian Alternative | Dr. Milad Hanna |
| | Ahmed Ibrahim Mahmoud |
| 31- Qualitative Military Superiority | Dr. Ahmed Fakhr |
| 32- Women Conference in Beijing | Dr. Inas Taha |
| 33- The Middle Eastern Market in the Arab Israeli Peace Equation | Dr. Taha Abdel Alim |
| 34- The Religious Trends in the Arab Maghreb, A Comparative Analysis | Dr. Hoda Mitkis |
| 35- Egypt's National Project: An Economic Vision for the year 2020 | Dr. Sultan Abu Aly |
| 36- The Arabs and The West: Towards a Constructive Dialogue | Dr. Abdel Alim Mohamed |
| 37- Low Intensity Conflict in the Middle East | Dr. Gehad Audu - Ashraf Radi |
| 38- Three Regional Spheres in Iran's Foreign Policy | Dr. Walid M. Abdel Nasser |
| 39- Economic Reform and Privatisation in Egypt | Dr. Ali A. Soliman |
| 40- The Oil Producers - Consumers Dialogue | Dr. Hussain Abdallah |
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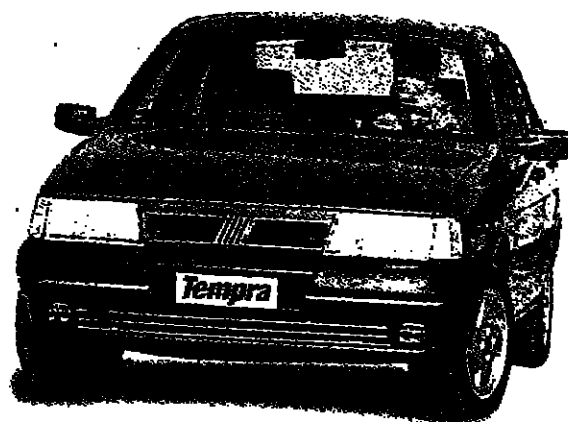
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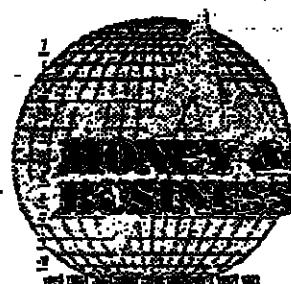
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World Bank fights corruption

THE WORLD Bank will take active measures to stop corruption worldwide by providing aid only to governments engaged in the fight against corruption, the president of the World Bank stated in its Paris-based periodical.

The World Bank president also confirmed that corruption is rife in so many Asian and African countries that it is almost a tradition. If corruption continues to prevail, he said, it will come at the expense of development.

MONEY & BUSINESS



Delivery of Tempra 1600

NILE Engineering Co. celebrated the delivery of the first production run of the Fiat Tempra 1600. The celebration took place at the Mena House Hotel. Suliman Rida, the Egyptian minister of industry, and Ahmed El-Arnai, minister of manpower, attended the celebrations. Representatives of Fiat Co. attended the celebration as well.

Rida hailed the success of Egyptian industry in producing the Fiat Tempra according to the specifications of those pro-

duced in Italy. He added that automobile producers in Egypt managed to upgrade their industry, which is considered an important tool in achieving economic growth. It also helps in boosting other feeder industries. The manufacturing of the Fiat Tempra is being supervised by a team of Italian experts from Fiat. The success of the car is seen by advance orders for 2,000 Fiat automobiles. Further requests for reservations had to be postponed.

Tango offering multilingual browsing

TANGO is a multilingual browser based on the latest release of Spyglass Mosaic. Our browser is rich with the most advanced technology, providing outstanding performance, top quality display capabilities, extensive formatting features and a friendly interface, all in your own language.

What's more, Tango is the only browser to offer truly internationalised content; even the hyperlinks change with the language of the interface. For example, the "What's New" button in the English interface hyperlink to the latest hot spots in English, while the "Quoi de Neuf" button in French links to Brachez-Vous!, a list of sites that are relevant to French-speaking users.

Independent of the interface language, you can choose your document language. For example in the Language Preferences under the Language menu, if you choose the first language to be Arabic, Tango will

automatically detect the language of the Web server and the code page it uses so you can still change the code page manual from the character sets under the language menu. For example, if Tango does not find Arabic data on a server, it will look for the second option in your Language Preferences and so on. If you did not already add another one, Tango will default to the English and Latin 1 code set for you to retrieve documents.

Tango is the only browser that has help menus and messages for the interface language you choose, and direction menu from which you can align your documents to the right or to the left, naturally aligning Arabic documents to the right.

Tango can work under any Windows platform, Windows 3.1, 3.11, NT and Windows 95, and any Windows language in English, European languages, Japanese, Arabic, and more.

German-Arab Chamber of Commerce hold business luncheon

A BUSINESS luncheon was held which was hosted by Mr Ernst Breit, the former chairman of Labour Unions Federation and vice-president Friedrich Ebert. Also attending the meeting was the German ambassador to Egypt.

The meeting discussed the role played by labour unions in economic development. Focusing on competition in international markets, Breit also indicated that at the same time, there should be social clauses introduced to international trade agreements. The

trade unions' most important role is to set these clauses.

The benefit of analysing successful economic development in countries such as Korea was also mentioned. Such development will lead to the emergence of a much more dynamic role for trade unions.

Concluding his speech, Breit stressed the important role trade unions play in achieving social stability and protection of its manpower, which is considered a developing country's most vital wealth.

Top business books

BOOKS dealing with the latest business trends and theories applied in countries like Japan and the United States are currently being translated into Arabic so that managers and executives can benefit from such knowledge.

Nessim El-Samadi, general manager of a leading information institution, told *Money and Business* that his company publishes the hottest titles in the business, such as *The Thinker's Toolkit*, *People Performance and Pay*, *The Internet Strategy Handbook*, *Building Strong Brands*, *Advanced Selling Strategies*, and others.

Jumping to the 21st century

FREE exchange of information, access to the Internet, these are what makes the century a revolutionary one.

One of the first centres providing Internet services in Egypt is the International Electronic Centre (IEC). Other services related to the Internet such as e-mail, FTP, Gopher and the World Wide Web are also provided.

State-of-the-art methods of home page design and other marketing and advertising services are also available. To perfect its range of services, IEC will offer specialised training courses on a wide range of topics such as Internet applications.

Seminar on privatisation

THE FULBRIGHT Commission inaugurated a series of seminars on privatisation, the first of which took place last Wednesday. A number of Egyptian and American university professors spoke at the seminar, which focused on providing answers for questions on the role of academics in informing the public on privatisation. At the forefront of the open discussion was the possibility of teaching specific courses on privatisation at the university level.

Twenty years of Peugeot in Egypt

FOR 20 years now, Peugeot has been represented and distributed by an Egyptian company named Centre for Commerce and Development (CDC), this name being associated in Egypt with the name of its late founder and president, Mr Wagih Abaza.

CDC Wagih Abaza developed its market, thanks to the 504 and 505 sedans and station wagons which were sold by the thousands during the late 70s and early 80s, most of which are still plying Egyptian roads serving millions of commuters.

CDC Wagih Abaza and Automobile Peugeot joined their forces to make a feasible project of local assembly of Peugeot cars.

Many attempts failed at an assembly agreement until 1993, when every needed agreement was signed between the two parties, Peugeot and CDC.

The decision was made to create Peugeot Egypt, and an agreement was reached with the Arab Organisation for Industrialisation to assemble our products in their assembly plant, devoted to the production of Chrysler jeeps.

The first pre-production of the 405 made in Egypt began in December 1994. Since then, more than 4000 Peugeot 405s have been produced in Egypt.

The capital of Peugeot Egypt is shared between Automobiles Peugeot, CDC Wagih Abaza, Banque du Caire et de Paris and the National Societe Generale Banque.

The company's basic object is to manufacture and assemble Peugeot passenger cars with a local content percentage of 40 per cent including 10 per cent of the assembly operations.

The production of the Peugeot 405 sedan will soon be discontinued in the European plants of Automobiles Peugeot, but its manufacture will continue for years in Egypt, our operations taking over those of Peugeot France and Peugeot Egypt, hence becoming the supplier of Peugeot 405 sedans for the Middle East.

The 405 is currently manufactured in Egypt in its GL version, equipped with the traditional fixtures which make our reputation:

— A 1,600cc engine fitted with a carburetor, to operate on petrol with a low-octane ratio.

— A heavy-duty suspension, a lower protection of the engine and additional arc welding on the body to cope with tough road conditions.

— A reinforced air intake filtering system to operate in dusty atmosphere.

But this GL is provided with a fair level of equipment, including air-conditioning and tinted glass, power steering, central locks, front electric windows, headrests on the front and rear seats, third high-mounted brake lights.

The Clarion radio/cassette player and loudspeakers are supplied as standard fixtures, and while the upholstery of the seats is made of textile fabric, leather seats can be provided as option.

The Peugeot 405GL is readily available for deliveries and is offered in 8 colours, white, black and red as solid colours, gold, silver, green, blue and wine as metallic ones.

The ever-lasting Peugeot 505, considered as the standard for its category, is now being manufactured in an Arab country for the Arab world to meet the strong local demand for this vehicle which is, in many of these countries, still used by millions of commuters.

Egypt started its production some days ago and is presently one of the very few manufacturers of this car in the world.

The Peugeot 505 family will be powered by a 2,000cc carburetor engine and will have top level equipment including air-conditioning, power steering, front electric windows and central locks.

The seven seats will be trimmed with velvet fabric, and the radio will be supplied as a standard item as well as the roof rack made of two bars.

As it will be introduced as a top level product, special attention will be paid to its manufacture in order to present the highest calibre of production to its customers.

Next week: A preview of the new Peugeot 405 Prestige

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Abdel-Rahman Teccerari: Living dangerously

From reading the Hieroglyphic writing on the wall to hurling chairs at rowdy dancers, life can be quite eventful

Was life at the foot of the Pyramids in the popular village of Nazlet El-Simman the dream which lured Abdel-Rahman Teccerari, all those years ago, from his home in Germany? The German trainer of the Egyptian television ballet troupe during the sixties, Teccerari's enchantment with Egypt had started long before his professional links with the country.

Teccerari had his encounter with Egypt and made his conversion to Islam long before his appointment to the Egyptian television service. Of a sentimental nature, Teccerari's fascination with Egypt and his three-decade association with the country are cast in romantic hues. Even as an undergraduate specialising in ballet and film acting at the Berlin Academy of Arts, Teccerari says he "had an ever-growing interest in ancient civilisations: Egyptian, Indian, Chinese and Mexican." The two courses he took in Egyptology at the University of Heidelberg in 1946 were, for him, not solely a matter of deciphering Hieroglyphs. The music of Ancient Egypt, its dances, the costumes, all affirmed his sense of an almost mystical link to the country.

Teccerari has but one explanation for this: a staunch believer in reincarnation, he is convinced that his own soul had been embodied, in the past, in an ancient Egyptian. "Although as a Muslim, I am aware that Islam — as well as Christianity and Judaism, for that matter — rejects the concept of the transmigration of souls, I cannot explain how I knew my way around Luxor the very first time I visited the city. I felt I had always known the place," he exclaims.

Recollections of his recent past, however, are not so vivid. "Ernest," or "Ernesto," to which he once answered, are distant memories. "Ernesto" of course is the Latin version of my name: it gives away my Italian ancestry on my father's side. My mother is descended from Russian-Polish stock," he explains. For the past 30 years, his name has been Mohamed Abdel-Rahman, "so that now, hearing the name 'Ernest' no longer arouses my immediate response." Likewise, Teccerari does not like to indulge in conversation about his social background, though his business card bears a coat of arms and designates him as a count. He will explain perfunctorily that he does not care much for wealth or luxury, both of which he has lost since his family disinherited him after his conversion to Islam.

It was in 1960 that Teccerari's path first took him to Egypt. "It was a decisive year in my life, as I stood at a crossroads. I was in London acting in a film and the director advised me to go to Hollywood where I would stand a bigger chance as a film actor," he recalls. Just around that time, he received a letter from Abdel-Rahman Sidki, a member of the Egyptian delegation responsible for selecting ballet experts to establish the Egyptian television ballet troupe. "I had to choose which course to take for my life, but the choice seemed to come naturally, for it was an opportunity for me to visit Egypt, which I had been yearning to do for a long time."

In Egypt, Teccerari set out to establish the core group of dancers for the Egyptian television troupe. "We were eight boys and eight girls," recalls Mohamed Abdel-Rahman, a lawyer whom Teccerari dubs "Butterfly." "I was only nineteen and studying to become a lawyer. My love for dancing had been hitherto restricted to amateur performances at university... While we rehearsed in the still unfinished television building, the painters carried on with their work, decorating the walls. But we were so impressed by our performance that we barely noticed their presence and the hubbub echoing through the building."

The true show-case of Teccerari's talents as a ballet teacher, his moment of glory one might even say, was the occasion of Khrushchev's visit to Egypt to celebrate the diversion of the course of the Nile at the early stage of the building of the High Dam. Dr Abdel-Qader Hatem, then minister of culture and national guidance, had commissioned Teccerari with the production of a Pharaonic ballet to mark the event, giving him "carte blanche" to recruit all the elements he needed. "I wasted no time," says Teccerari. "I selected 40 boys and 40 girls for the performance." The training and control of such a large number of performers, no easy matter, was the least of Teccerari's worries. "My trying problem was to stop the dancers from chattering all the time. This was so hard that at times I found myself flinging chairs at them to stop the endless twittering," he declares in tones of mock-exasperation.

Some time later, Teccerari invited Abdel-Qader Hatem to attend one of the rehearsals for the performance. Astounded, the minister asked the director how it was as a foreigner, he had managed to enforce such discipline. Omitting to mention flying chairs, Teccerari answered "that I am as much an Egyptian at heart as you are, the only difference is that you speak Arabic fluently, while I speak it with some difficulty" — an explanation which met with the minister's approval.

The troupe went to Aswan to perform the Pharaonic ballet for the benefit of Khrushchev and Nasser. The Soviet leader had wished that a Soviet ballet troupe participate in the festivities on the establishment of the High Dam and thus the Soviet delegation included a number of male and female dancers from the Bolshoi, Nasser, on the other hand, had wanted to entertain his guests by offering them a Pharaonic show by an Egyptian troupe. The end result was extremely gratifying to Teccerari whose troupe performed before Yugoslavian President Tito, Nehru from India, Ben Bella from Algeria, and King Hussein of Jordan. Gradually, the ballet troupe introduced TV viewers

to such dances as the rumba, the samba and the can-can. But their *pièce de résistance* was an "Around the World Dance". Here, Teccerari ingeniously introduced as the finale the belly-dance performed by no less than Samia Gamal at the first, second and third anniversaries of Egyptian television. Eventually Teccerari's dedication and contribution to Egyptian TV were due for recognition, but he seems not to have grasped the opportunity. "Dr [Abdel-Qader] Hatem, who knew how much I loved Egypt, led me by hand to his office one day," Teccerari recalls wistfully. "He lifted the telephone receiver and said, 'If you want to become an Egyptian, all you have to do is let me make a phone-call.' But I don't know what came over me. I didn't think there was any need to formally put on paper what had been a living reality for me." Instead Teccerari procrastinated: "I asked for some time to deliberate. It was stupid of me because it all ended there."

But Teccerari could not have foreseen the change of tide towards foreign experts, or the reduction of their salaries. There was an economic crisis, as well as an overall trend to subsidise foreigners with Egyptians in various state organisations. More relevant to Teccerari's status was the establishment of a Ballet Institute in 1962. As a result, Teccerari had to leave: "The [financial]

problem was not solved, hence I was forced to leave, but during the entire four-hour flight to Germany, I could not stop crying: the air hostess thought I was suffering from some painful disease." Back in Germany, he slipped into a long depression: "I did not leave my mother's house for a whole year."

But Teccerari's wanderings did not end there. He eventually went to Iran where he acted in four films, one of which was a comedy of sorts based on the story of Adam and Eve in which Teccerari co-starred with an Irish actress. Next, he went to Pakistan on another cinematic mission that was aborted on account of the war with India. "I was living in Karachi, but one evening on my way home, I found an unusually intense darkness enveloping the place where the house stood. I fumbled in my pocket for the keys, but was flabbergasted to discover that the house was now a pile of rubble at my feet. It had been destroyed by a bomb." A number of bedrooms he had left in the house were, of course, irretrievable. Although he had previously considered settling in Pakistan, he went back to Germany.

Back in Germany in 1976, Teccerari opened a school to teach classical and modern ballet in Solingen, near Düsseldorf. The school, he says, was a real success. The number of students in his school reached 150, a large number for a small city like Solingen. However, reactionaries soon started to provoke the city against the Muslim owner of the school. So successful was this defamation campaign that the number of students dwindled until there were only eight left. Teccerari eluded death for the second time when he was fired at in Solingen. But the incident plunged him into a nervous breakdown. "I felt death was drawing closer to me, and thought so much of Egypt, that I implored my friend to sprinkle on me after my death a few grains of Egypt's soil. I had kept in a jar." Strong sedatives prescribed by his doctors did little to improve Teccerari's state of mind.

If he entertained the dream of revisiting Egypt, it was more as a return to the womb/tomb. "I was obsessed with the idea that all I needed was to go to Sharm El-Sheikh, take two tablets of my sedatives and plunge into the sea. Then, all would be over." Destiny, in the form of a *saidi* waiter, had other plans, however, for Teccerari.

He had intended to pay a last visit to the monuments of Luxor, but once there was unable to find a place on any flight to Sharm El-Sheikh. He thus sat at the city's cafes, while the time away with the aid of his sedatives. Meanwhile, a *saidi* waiter who had observed the *Mawwaga's* odd behaviour decided to draw Teccerari into conversation. He managed to elicit some information about a friend of Teccerari's in Cairo: a certain resident of Nazlet El-Simman by the name of Sami who rented out horses to tourists in the Pyramids area. "I was surprised by a call from someone who asked me if I knew a Teccerari and alerting me to the fact that he was on the point of suicide," recalls Sami.

Teccerari completes the story: "Suddenly, I found Sami in front of me, urging me to bring my luggage and go back with him to Cairo. I was filled with shame that I had considered suicide when I was surrounded by my old faithful friends." Over the past nine months Teccerari has been living at his friend Sami's. He has spent all his savings on two horses to work alongside Sami's horses in the Pyramids area. He also invested some money in a souvenir shop on the road to Madi, but that investment has proved unprofitable. His yearning for a comeback to the performing arts persists, but can the wheel of time be reversed to bring back Teccerari's times of joy and success?

Profile by Hani Mustafa

Pack of Cards

by Madame Sosostri

♦ All those who have known Mohamed Shebl are mourning his untimely death but some of his friends have decided to do a little more: About 20 of them gathered around *Al-Ahram Hebdo* executive editor-in-chief, Mohamed Salmawy, whose idea it was to create a group, the *Friends of Mohamed Shebl*, who will be awarding a prize every year on 14 July (Mohamed's birthday) to a promising young director for his first or second film. Mohamed's friends include actresses Yousra, Nadia Lutfi and Is'ad Younis, directors Youssef Chahine and Youssef Nasrallah as well as Abdel-Ghani Abul-Ezla and Ranya El-Nimr who is also Shebl's maternal aunt. The *Friends of Mohamed Shebl*, meeting for the first time at *Al-Ahram*, have already collected a substantial sum and intend to keep up the fund raising effort. The money will be placed in a bank account in the name of the group and the interest accrued will be used for the annual cash prize.



Michael von Raben

♦ Friendship is a word that definitely does something for me. As soon as I hear it, I melt inside. Well I was talking about this noblest of feelings last week with Mohamed El-Sa El-Sharkawi, *Al-Ahram* bureau chief in Frankfurt. He readily agreed although he confessed that he is more moved by friendships on a grander scale. Mohamed is one of "Germany's good friends", a title conferred to him at the inaugural ceremony of the Deutsch-Agyptische-Gesellschaft, a newly founded society to boost friendship between people of the two countries. The idea of this society came to Dr Michael von Raben, headmaster of the Goethe-Schule in Kassel, who, having observed the success of the exchange student programme, wanted to do more. Well he has and egged on by Mohamed, I decided to attend the inaugural dinner. A skip and a jump later, there I was, sitting in Kassel at Mahmoud Elabl restaurant between Edith Schneider, head secretary of the new society and Ingrid Meyer-Spangenberg its treasurer.

Michael, who is the chairman of the society was welcoming all these friends we have in Germany. While over-enjoying the excellent buffet, I spotted Wolfgang Frei, who, Mohamed whispered in my ear was the president of the parliament of Kassel; former minister Hans Krollmann and

Hilbert von Löbhausen head of the municipal public affairs office. This of course is just the beginning. To follow soon are music recitals, films, free Arabic lessons and a library featuring Egyptian literature in Elabl's restaurant. I think I'll hang around here a little longer. See you in Kassel.

Melodies in Helnan Marina Sharm For the first time in Sharm El-Sheikh Helnan Marina Sharm

In collaboration with **Flash Tour** holds two concerts on **Thursday 17/10/1996**, the first is given by **Gouzour** which presents a blend of Egyptian, African and Latin American music on oriental and western instruments

Sharkiat will give the second concert on **Friday 18/10/1996** playing the splendid Jazz with oriental melodies

Musician Fathi Salama conducts the two concerts

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